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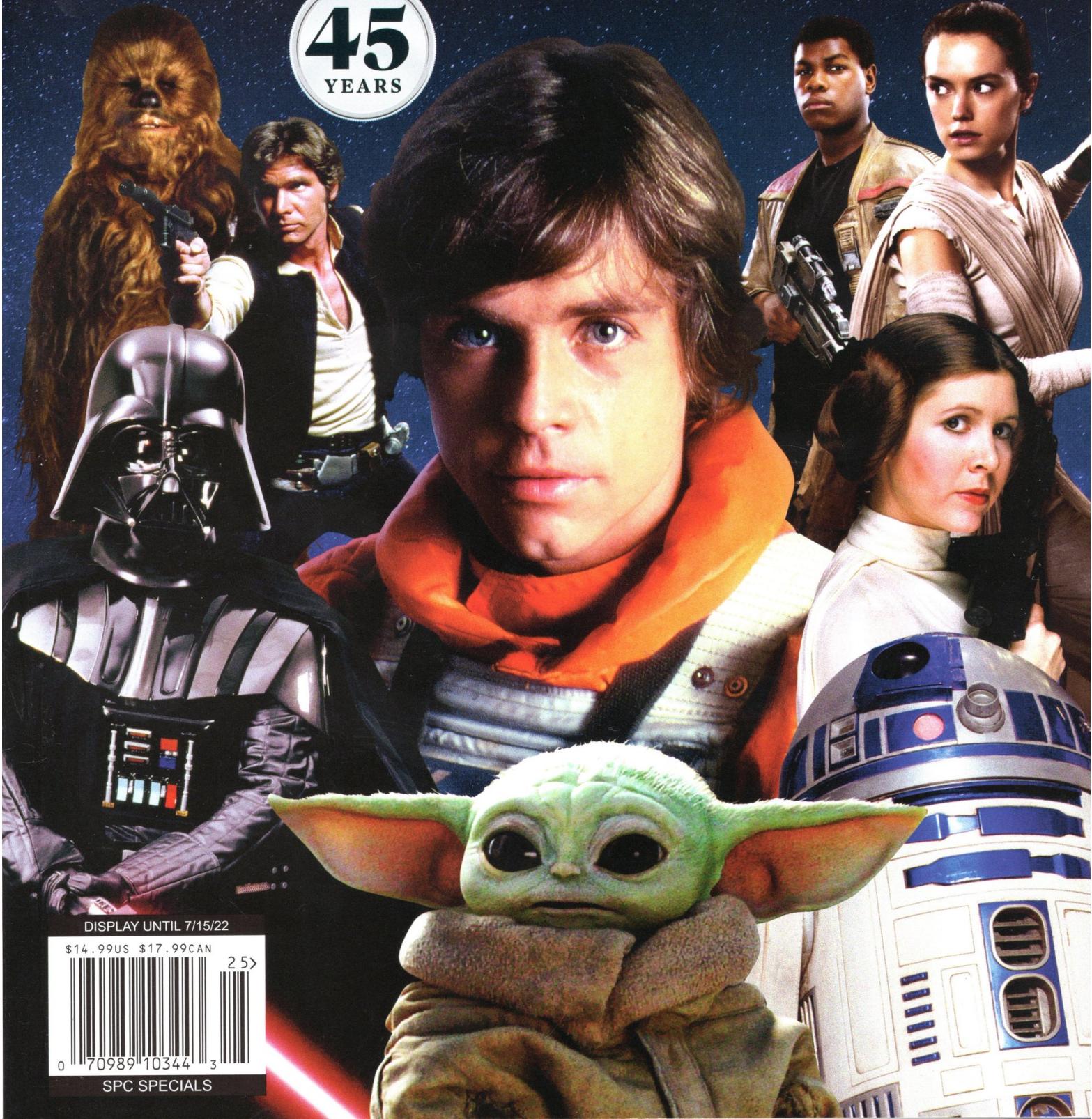
Los Angeles Times

EDITION

STAR WARS

The Skywalker Saga and Beyond

45
YEARS



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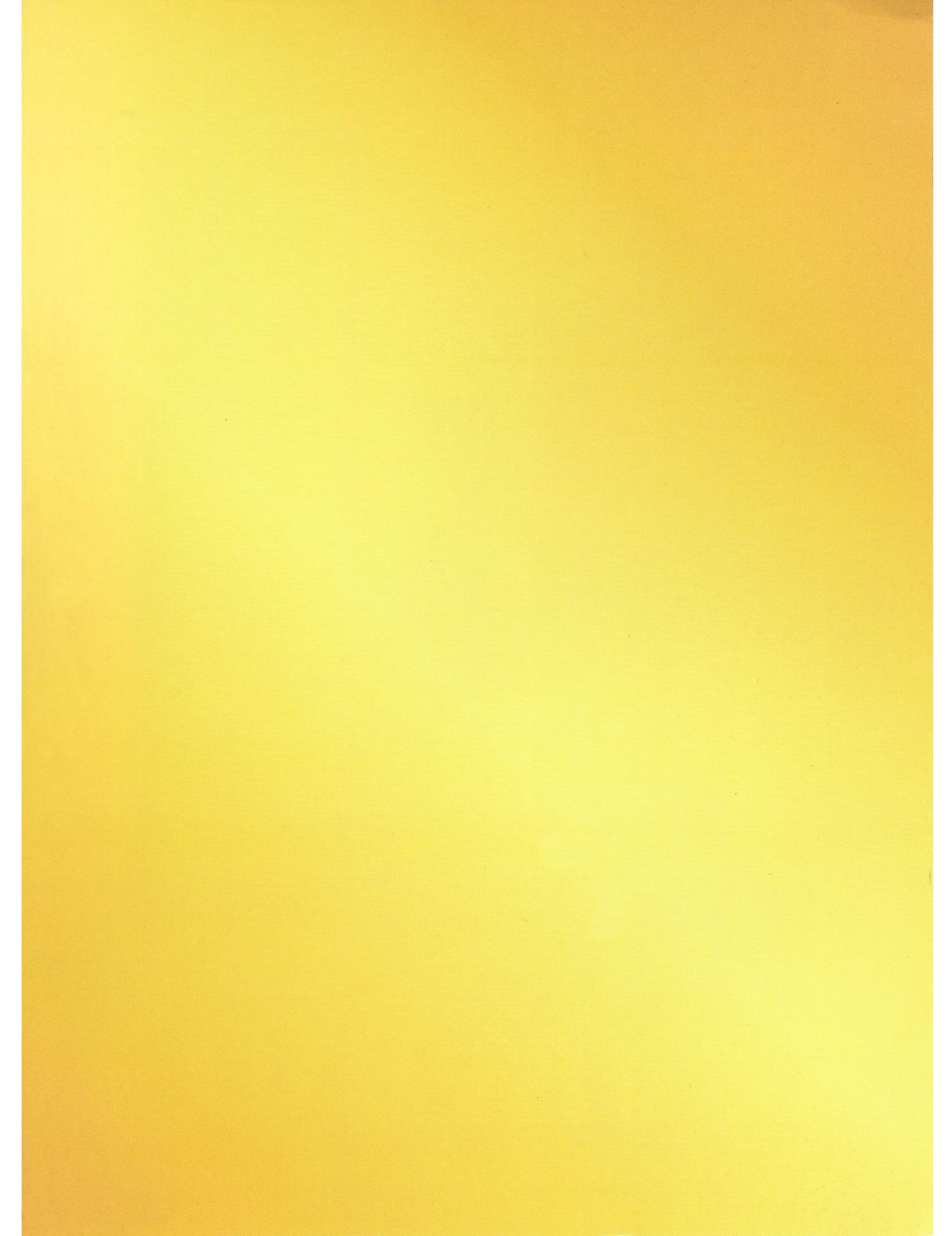
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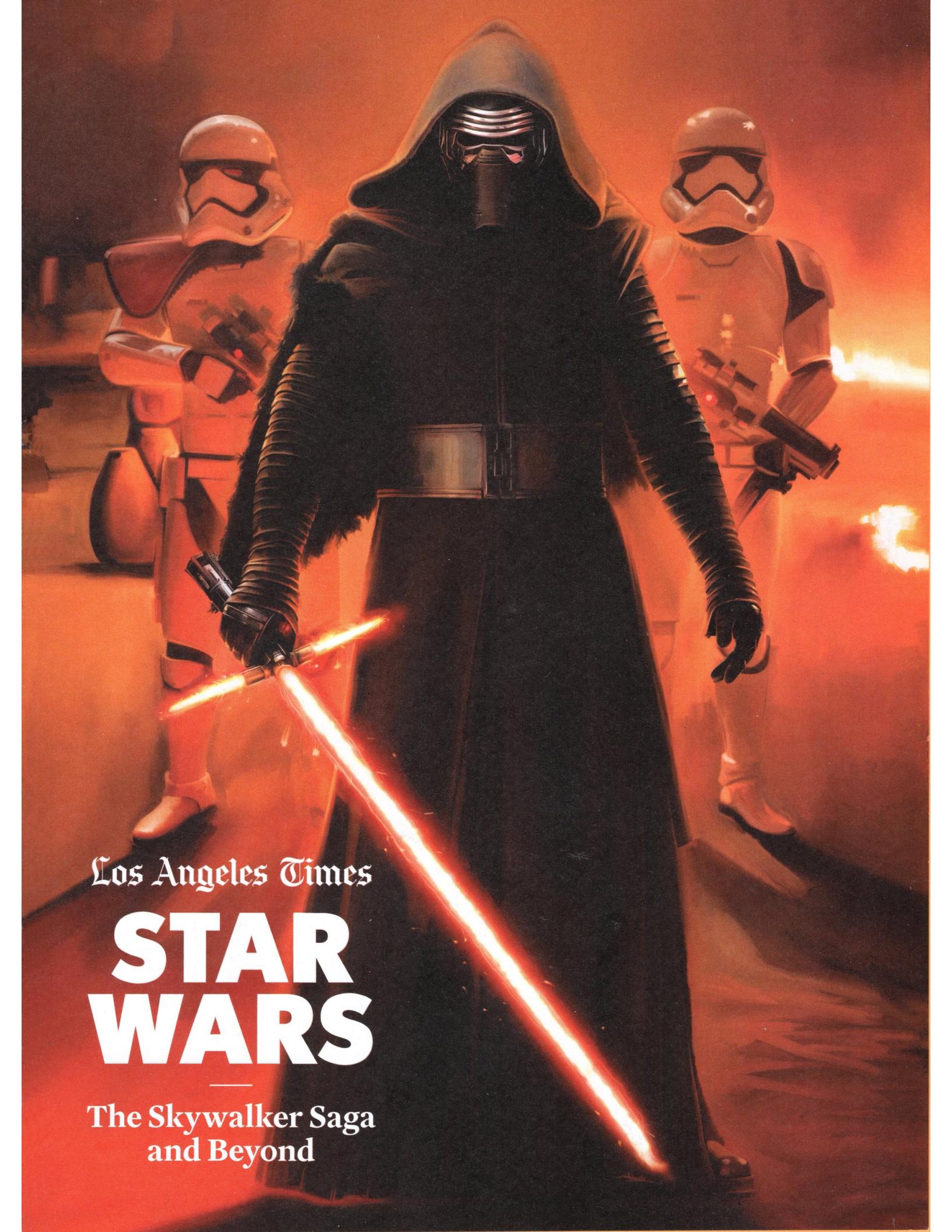
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SPC SPECIALS





Los Angeles Times

STAR WARS

The Skywalker Saga
and Beyond



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In The Last Jedi, Rey (Daisy Ridley) learned the ways of the Force from Luke Skywalker.

Force of Impact

For 45 years, the Star Wars franchise has captivated us with tales that are simultaneously fantastical and relatable.

BY COURTNEY MIFSUD INTREGLIA

I WATCHED MY first Star Wars film, *A New Hope*, when I was 11. I'll never forget the unease that set in as the diminutive blockade runner was captured by the imposing Imperial star destroyer. And then the stark, peaceful interior of the Rebel ship was invaded by an onslaught of stormtroopers with varying marksmanship prowess and a menacing villain who seemed neither man nor mechanical.

The intense opening was lightened by two bickering droids, a blond teenager squabbling with his aunt and uncle, and a world that was surprising and delightful at every turn. After that initial viewing, I clamored to watch *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi* and continued my marathon with *The Phantom Menace* and *Attack of the Clones*. *Revenge of the Sith* would be the first of several Star Wars films that I'd see in a theater on opening night.

Immensely popular, the initial releases of the 11 Star Wars films earned \$4.7 billion at the U.S. box office, which amounts to more than \$73 billion when adjusted for inflation. That does not include the multibillion-dollar merchandise industry, or the multitude of sequels, spinoffs, games, books and comics that the franchise has spawned.

With a legion of fanatics and casual fans, the saga has become embedded into modern culture. Forty-five years on, what's the reason for its astonishing success?

A New Hope fundamentally changed the aesthetics of Hollywood films and championed a boom in state-of-the-art special effects in the late 1970s. And although it is often characterized as science fiction, it's really so much more. The film is space opera meets fantasy meets Western, along with several other genres. *A New Hope* pioneered genre pastiche, which merges several classic film genres into one movie. By drawing inspiration from the past, George Lucas created a nostalgic quality that connected with moviegoers beyond the initial 1977 premiere.

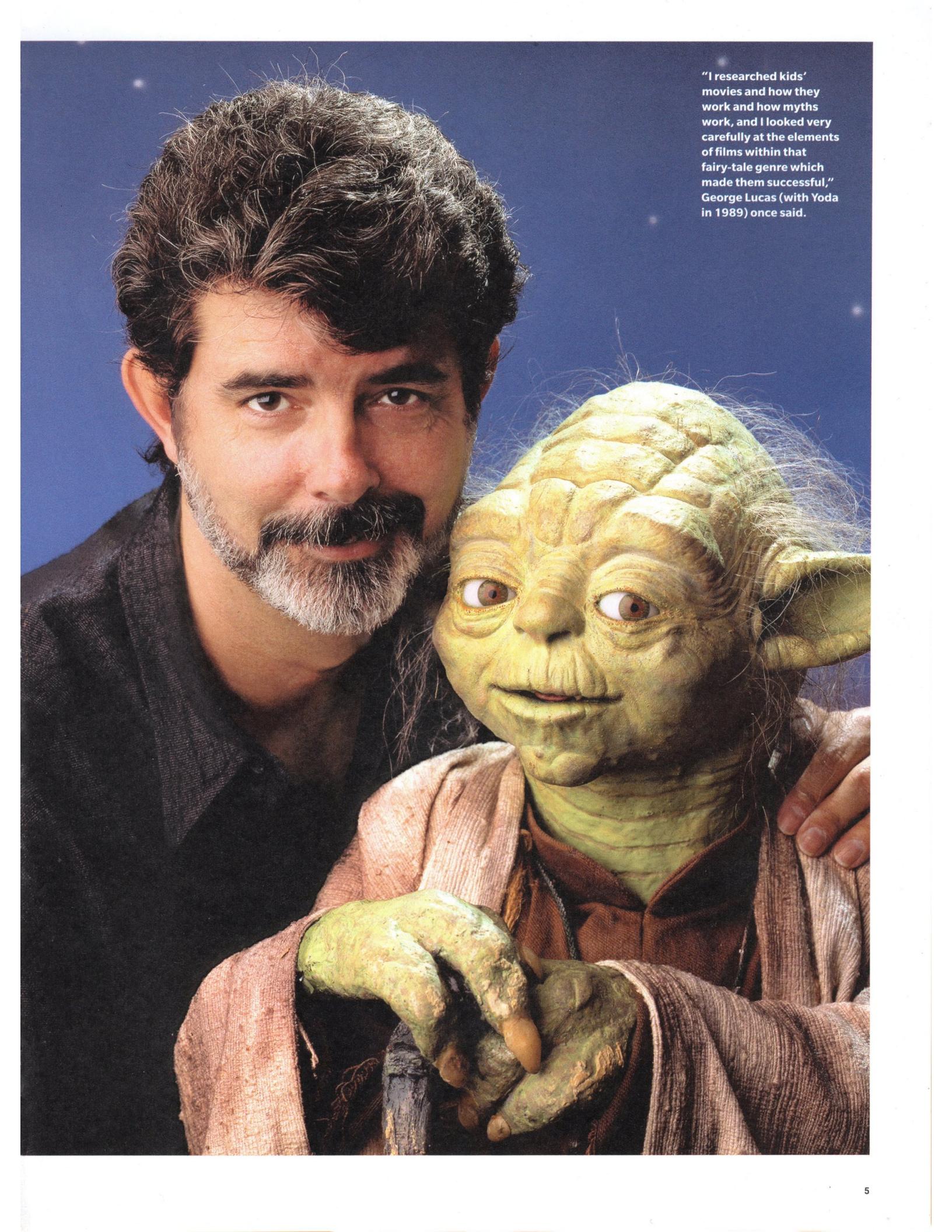
The Star Wars franchise has also been able to adapt and evolve with the times, connecting with each new generation. Despite the mediocre reviews from critics and adult fans, the prequels were considered cool among middle schoolers. With newer animation styles, a star-studded cast, acrobatic lightsaber fights and a myriad of spectacular alien species, Episodes I, II and III captivated a younger audience. Animated series like *The Clone Wars*

also introduced the mythos to a new demographic of fans.

With Disney's acquisition of Lucasfilm in 2012, the subsequent sequel trilogy appealed to the newest era of fans with a new lovable droid, imaginative landscapes and cuddly puffin-inspired porgs. Now, with *The Mandalorian*, *The Book of Boba Fett*, and soon *Obi-Wan Kenobi* dominating the streaming platform Disney+, the expansion of the Star Wars universe promises to welcome even more wannabe Jedi.

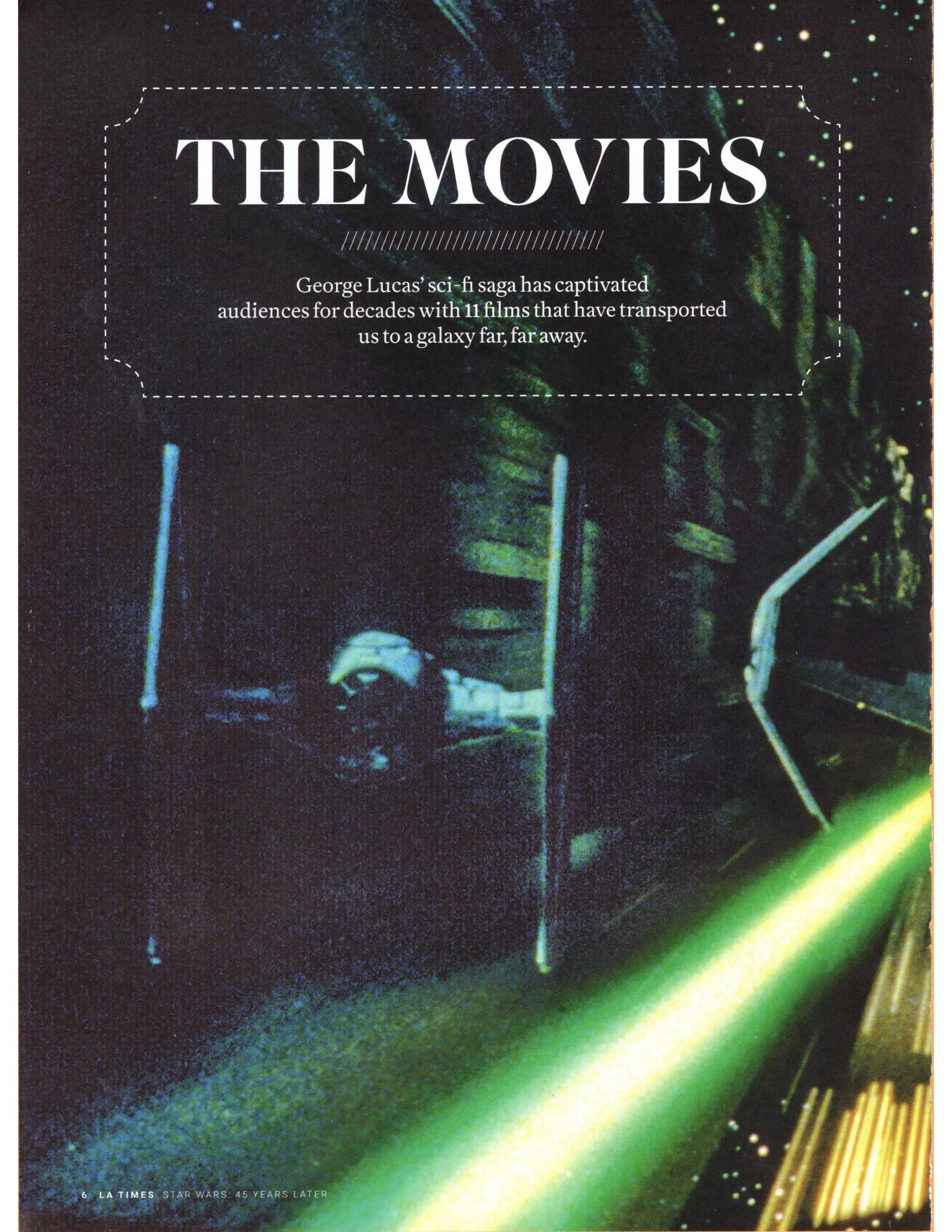
For many, like me, Star Wars is about family. The core nine films center on the Skywalker clan, including a troubled father once hailed as "the chosen one" and his twins, a princess turned politician/matriarch and a temperamental runaway with something to prove. These stories became central in the tale of my own family.

With four December releases between 2015 and 2019, returning home for the holidays meant watching the latest film together, sharing our favorite parts—and sometimes moments we wished had happened differently. Star Wars fans are known for our strong opinions on the films, and that's because these stories are so close to our hearts. ●

A color photograph of George Lucas and Yoda. George Lucas, on the left, is a middle-aged man with dark, wavy hair and a well-groomed, light-colored beard and mustache. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. To his right is Yoda, the iconic green Jedi master from the Star Wars films. Yoda has his characteristic wrinkled green skin, large brown eyes, and a small mouth. He is wearing a brown, textured robe and is holding a wooden staff with both hands. The background is a solid, dark blue.

"I researched kids' movies and how they work and how myths work, and I looked very carefully at the elements of films within that fairy-tale genre which made them successful,"
George Lucas (with Yoda in 1989) once said.

THE MOVIES



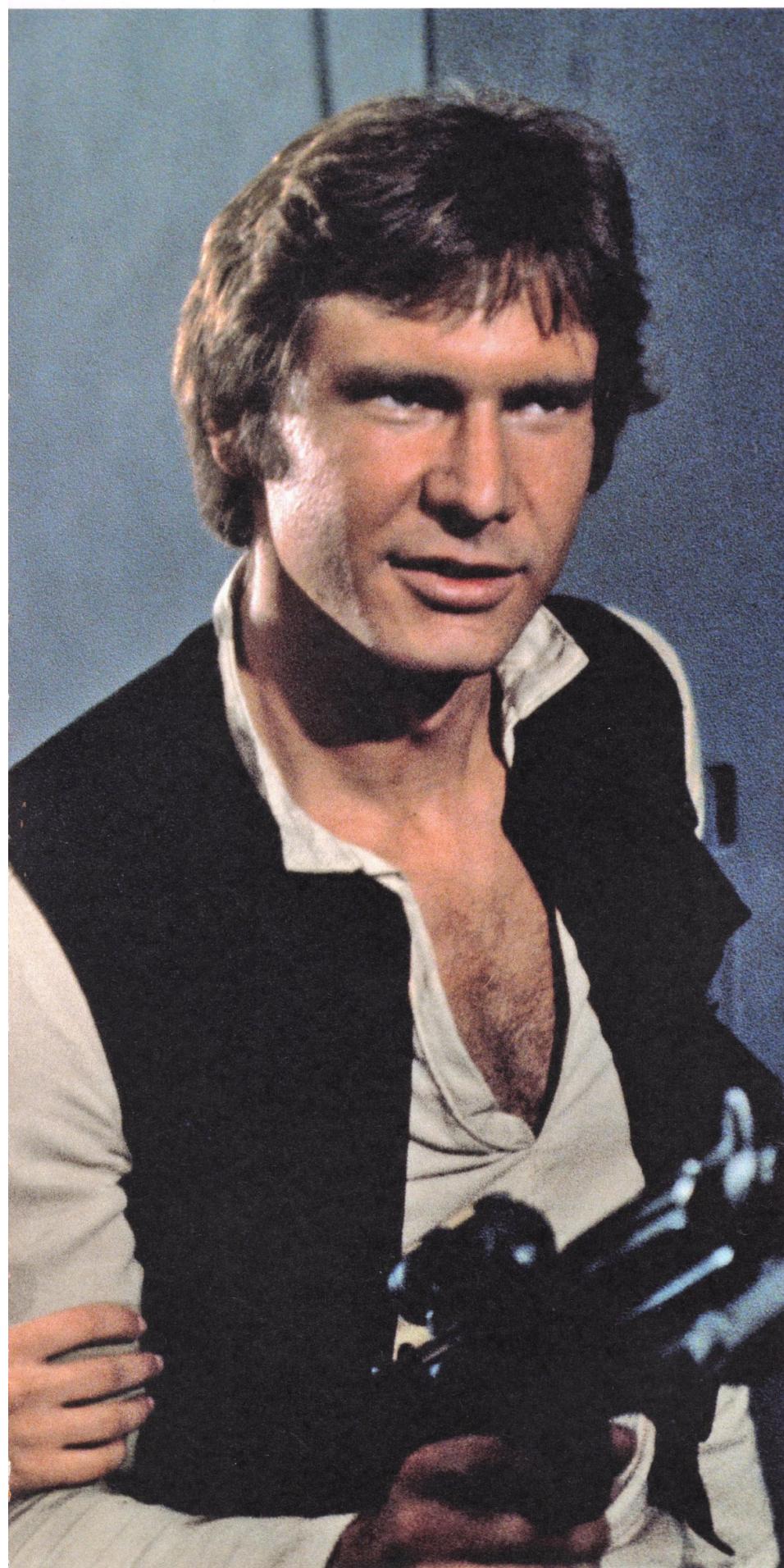
George Lucas' sci-fi saga has captivated audiences for decades with 11 films that have transported us to a galaxy far, far away.



Darth Vader's TIE fighter pursued Luke Skywalker during the Battle of Yavin in *A New Hope*.

Rebellion heroes Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill), Princess Leia Organa (Carrie Fisher) and Han Solo (Harrison Ford).





EPISODE IV

A New Hope

A franchise was born with a sci-fi spin on the classic battle between good and evil.

Director: George Lucas

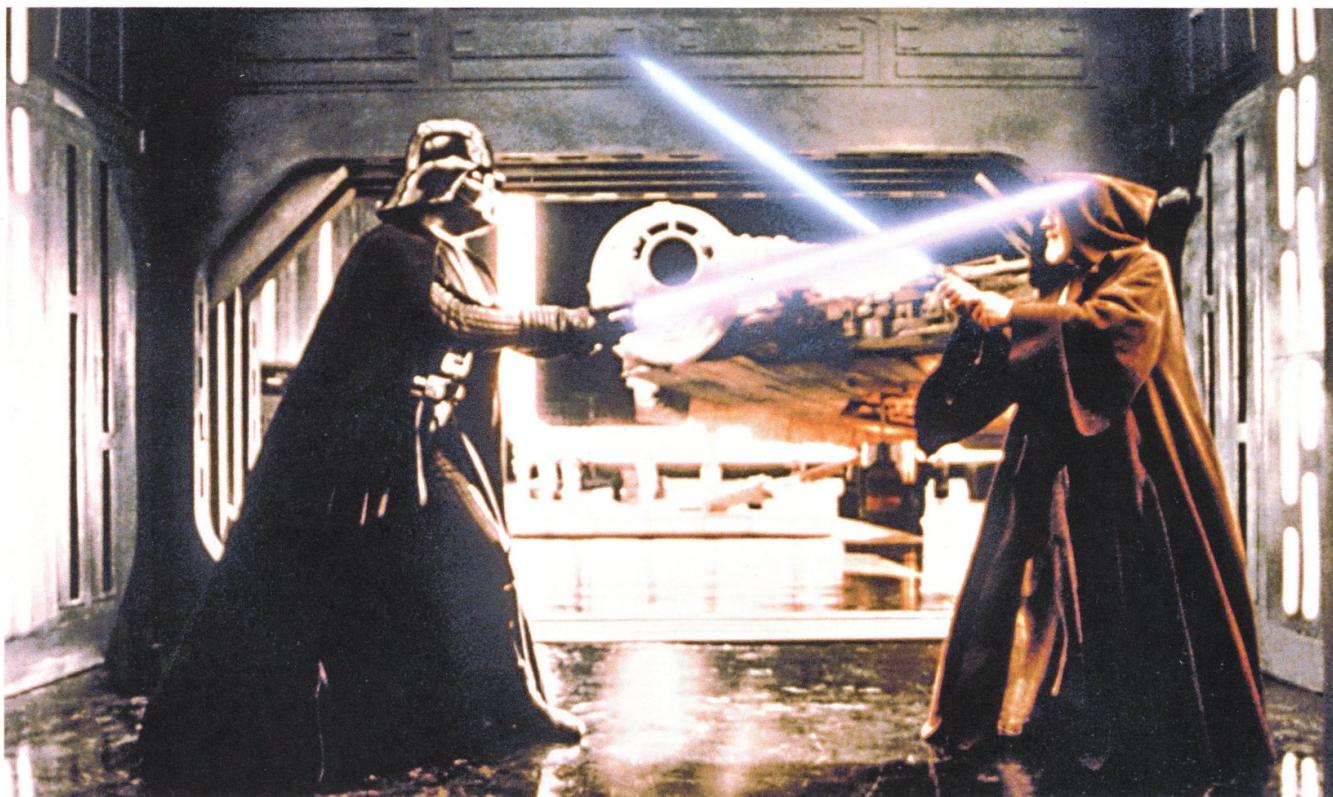
Release date: May 25, 1977

LUKE SKYWALKER begins a journey that will change the galaxy as he leaves his home planet of Tatooine, meets lifelong friends (Han Solo, Chewbacca, R2-D2, C-3PO, etc.), helps rebellion leader Leia Organa battle Darth Vader and the evil Empire, and learns the ways of the Force. The rebels ultimately destroy the Empire's Death Star, bringing a temporary peace.

Original Los Angeles Times review by Charles Champlin

Star Wars is Buck Rogers with a doctoral degree but not a trace of neuroticism or cynicism, a slam-bang, rip-roaring gallop through a distantly future world full of exotic vocabularies, creatures and customs, existing cheek by jowl with the boy and girl next door and a couple of friendly leftovers from *The Planet of the Apes* and possibly one from *Oz* (a Tin Woodman robot who may have got a gold plating as a graduation present).

After a once-upon-a-future-time-crawl establishing the story line (the



Clockwise from top: Darth Vader (played by David Prowse but voiced by James Earl Jones) battles Obi-Wan Kenobi (Alec Guinness); Leia and Luke make a daring escape; Chewbacca (Peter Mayhew) and Han Solo.

brave rebels encamped on a secret star and darting out to do battle with the vastly larger Imperial forces), Lucas plunges into the thick of things. His script takes it for granted that we know the lingo (we don't, but that's the fun of it) and who's who. We catch on quickly.

Mark Hamill is our likable young hero, rocketing around in the space-time equivalent of a Ford Roadster and eager to try bigger stuff. He's the orphan of a warrior who died bravely at the treasonable hand of a friend.

Events thrust Hamill into cahoots

with his father's old comrade in arms (Alec Guinness) and with the princess (Carrie Fisher) trying to get a desperately important secret message back to the rebels. It could undo the Imperials and their cruel leader (Peter Cushing).

Harrison Ford operates a tramp space freighter, no questions asked about cargo or passengers.

What all happens and how it all

ends hardly matters. The narrative space is jet-propelled or rocket-thrust and the invention is continuous, the crafts and sets and space complexes genuinely amazing in their minute detailing and believability...


TITLE TWIST
The first *Star Wars* movie wasn't officially rechristened *Episode IV—A New Hope* until it was rereleased in 1981.

It is hard to think of a place or an age group that would not respond to the enthusiastic inventiveness with which Lucas has enshrined his early loves. ●

CHRONOLOGY

How to Watch the Movies

What's the optimal sequence for your Star Wars binge? Weighing the merits of release versus episode order.

BY COURTNEY MIFSUD INTREGLIA

From "Who shot first?" to the meaning of midi-chlorians, debates among Star Wars fans are as common as lightsabers and incapable stormtroopers. But perhaps no opinion is as contested as the optimal order in which to watch the movies. With nine feature films highlighting the Skywalker saga (as well as two standalone films) released in batches over more than four decades, there are multiple points of entry for a new or returning viewer to begin a movie marathon.

Many, including the franchise's creator himself, argue that despite the release order, watching the movies in episode order (beginning with *The Phantom Menace* and watching through to *The Rise of Skywalker*) tells a complete story chronologically. "Start with one. That's the way to do it right: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. That's the way they're supposed to be done," George Lucas told *Vulture* in 2015, prior to the release of *The Force Awakens*. "Just because it took a long time to film it doesn't mean you don't do it in order."

According to Lucas, he intended for the story of Anakin Skywalker, as told in the prequels, to be released first. "I had planned for the first trilogy to be about the father, the second trilogy to be about the son, and the third trilogy to be about the daughter and the grandchildren," he explained in *The Star Wars Archives: 1999-2005*, written by film



Crowds showed up to see *Star Wars*—eventually known as *A New Hope*, the fourth chapter of the story—at Grauman's Chinese Theatre in Hollywood in 1977.

historian Paul Duncan. But those plans did not come to pass. The story of the original 1977 release and all the necessary world-building used a narrative technique known as *in medias res*, which is Latin for "into the middle of things."

A New Hope throws the viewer right into the action with a shot of a Star Destroyer in hot pursuit of Princess Leia's blockade runner above the planet Tatooine. The viewer is plunged into this foreign universe amid a developed galactic conflict, and the details become tantalizing. Who is the Emperor? Why is the Imperial Senate powerless to

stop him? And when viewers meet the lightsaber-wielding Darth Vader, slashing his way through the blockade runner's crew, the unspoiled observer must wonder if this villain is man or machine.

If a viewer enters into the franchise with *The Phantom Menace*, Darth Vader's spine-chilling nature is meaningfully dwindled. What viewers may have gained in context surrounding Anakin's origin trades off for impactful storytelling and imagery. It becomes much harder to take *A New Hope*'s villain seriously when you first met him as the half-pint "Ani" who has great disdain for sand.

Although Lucas might have initially planned to begin *Star Wars* from Anakin's point of view, that isn't how he ended up telling the story. The details that define *Star Wars* come together more effectively when they're discovered in release order (Episode VI first, then V, VI, I, II, III, VII, VIII and IX). First-time viewers benefit from the magic that happens when the story crystalizes.

Once you know the characters and their history, go ahead and rewatch it in episode order—the way Lucas intended. Perhaps you'll discover a new appreciation for the Skywalker saga.

EPISODE V

The Empire Strikes Back

Arguably one of the best sequels in cinematic history, the next chapter expanded the galaxy and dropped the father of all plot twists.

Director: Irvin Kershner
Release date: May 21, 1980

THREE YEARS after the destruction of the Death Star, the Empire has regrouped, with Darth Vader on the hunt to find Luke Skywalker. Luke meets a new mentor, Yoda, and discovers more about his connection to the Force while Han Solo and Leia Organa are double-crossed by Solo's friend Lando Calrissian (Billy Dee Williams). Luke helps rescue them, though Solo is captured, and—*epic spoiler alert!*—Luke finds out that Vader is his father.

Original Los Angeles Times review by Charles Champlin

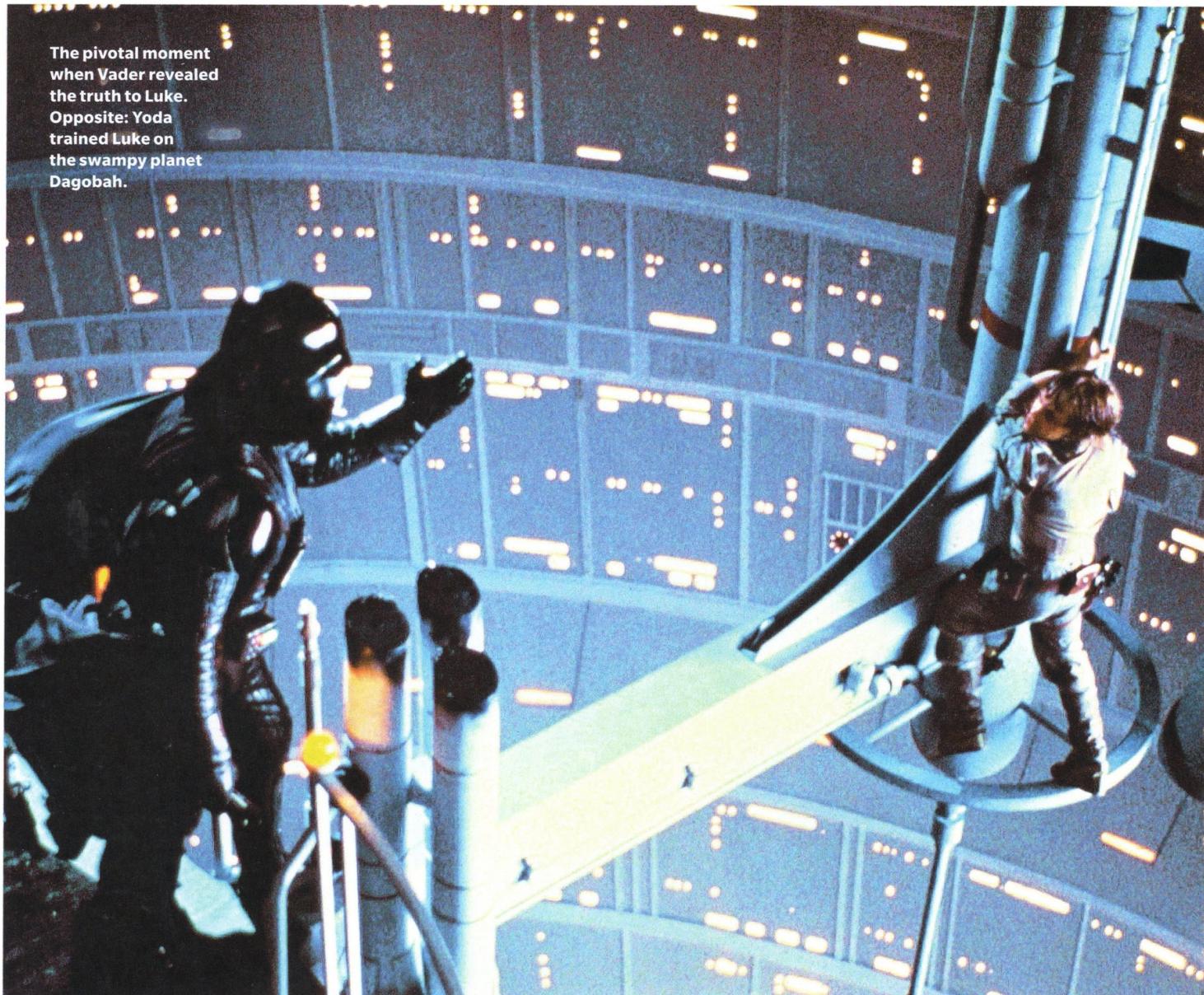
What can you say about *The Empire Strikes Back* that has not been said about the Acropolis, the cotton gin, Ella Fitzgerald's voice and *Star Wars*?

Chewbacca, C-3PO (Anthony Daniels), Leia and Han aboard the Millennium Falcon.





The pivotal moment when Vader revealed the truth to Luke. Opposite: Yoda trained Luke on the swampy planet Dagobah.



That's extravagant, of course, but the point is that there have been very few sequels in history for which commercial and creative success could be so confidently predicted. The unprecedented attendance for *Star Wars* assures a lot of business, even with slippage. In fact, *The Empire Strikes Back* seems to me a hugely accomplished and exciting follow-on to *Star Wars*—with a slow and extended stretch in the late going that will test the youngest and shortest attention spans, but with new material mixed with the familiar to rush the story forward.

It could hardly have been otherwise. The magic of *Star Wars* derived from George Lucas and his love of make-believe, at once childlike and

hugely sophisticated, and from his myth-sized view of the absolutes of good and evil, courage and treachery. The extent of the popularity of *Star Wars*, and its games, toys and lunch pails, may have amazed even Lucas, but the creative integrity of the film was in no way accidental, and the same sureness of vision gives force to *The Empire Strikes Back*.

It is easier this time to sense the Grand Design. *Star Wars*, as it is now known, was Episode IV of a nine-episode master plot that Lucas has outlined. *The Empire Strikes Back* is titled Episode V, and indeed, it feels much more like a segment in a larger story, with an ending that is (cleverly) both a resolution and a cliffhanger that

leaves one of our heroes in chilling jeopardy and Darth Vader—ah, but that would be telling.

Sequels have costs and gains. A certain feeling of wondrous discovery is gone forever. After all, we've been to the galaxy before. On the other hand, the action can thrust forward, freed of a lot of expository needs, and with time to get a bit more deeply into characters and relationships, to embroider themes, to sketch more of that grander design and to invigorate the proceedings with new creatures and characters.

The Empire Strikes Back suggests strongly that the Lucas imagination has hardly begun to be tested. He and his scriptwriters, the late and excellent



Leigh Brackett and her successor, Lawrence Kasdan, have in particular come up with an absolute enchanter named Yoda, a wise old party who cannot be more than two feet high standing on tiptoe but who coached both Ben Kenobi and Luke Skywalker's father and is now trying to install some patient good sense into impetuous young Luke himself.

Unquestionably, the chanciest departure of *The Empire Strikes Back* is to advance the idea of a romantic triangle, with Carrie Fisher as the strong-willed princess sought after in a teasing, robust way by Harrison Ford as Han Solo but drawn to the handsome but reticent Luke. It is a construction that did wonders for Gable,

Tracy and Loy, among other classic screen trios, and if it is kept light and urbane, with the emphasis on palship and not on amorous sweats, it should work nicely. Lucas, I presume, doesn't need to be reminded that mushy stuff was a Saturday-morning turn-off if there ever was one.

Episode VI, Lucas says, will be called *Revenge of the Jedi*. It completes the middle trilogy of his remarkable saga and will also complete the struggle between Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader—winner to be announced later. Whether we'll ever see Episodes I, II and III, involving Luke's father,

or Episodes VII, VIII and IX, which would carry the story forward another 20 years or so, is not clear. What is certain is that the Lucas vision will be a part of our world for years.

THE WIZARD OZ
Frank Oz was the puppeteer and voice behind Yoda. Prior to this role, he was best known for his work on *Sesame Street* and *The Muppet Show*, especially as Miss Piggy.

The Empire Strikes Back is rated PG, I guess for the intensity of its excitement. But it is a family film, or the term has lost its meaning altogether. It is expansive but more tightly time-framed in terms of plot. I wish it were a handful of minutes shorter, but this is my single caveat about another richly imaginative, engrossing and spectacular motion picture from the redoubtable George Lucas. ●





As a prisoner of Jabba the Hutt, Leia sported what has become—for better or for worse—an iconic look.

EPISODE VI

Return of the Jedi

The (first) trilogy came to a close with the final confrontation between Luke and Vader, and new creatures both creepy and cute.

Director: Richard Marquand
Release date: May 25, 1983

LUKE SKYWALKER Leads a mission to rescue Han Solo from the clutches of gangster Jabba the Hutt and faces Darth Vader one last time. Along the way, he learns that Leia is his sister. Meanwhile, the Rebellion pushes to destroy a second Death Star with a little help from alien teddy bears called Ewoks.

Original Los Angeles Times review by Sheila Benson

The Jedi return to us at last, older, wiser and, frankly, irresistible. Of all its many qualities, *Return of the Jedi* is fully satisfying—it gives honest value to all the hopes of its believers.

With this last of the central Star Wars cycle, there is the sense of the closing of a circle, of leaving behind real friends. It is accomplished with a weight and a new maturity that seem entirely fitting, yet the movie has lost



Clockwise from top: Luke attempted to rescue Han from Jabba the Hutt; the Ewoks were awed by the long-suffering C-3PO, whom they mistook for a god; Nien Nunb (Richard Bonehill) and Lando piloted the Millennium Falcon in the Battle of Endor.

none of its sense of fun; it bursts with new inventiveness. With *Jedi*, George Lucas may have pulled off the first triple crown of motion pictures.

While we press on with the business of Jedi knighthood and Rebel battles, with the question of Luke Skywalker's parentage and with Luke's confrontation of his own dark side and his attempt to master it, director Richard Marquand and writer Lawrence Kasdan, who shares screenplay credit with Lucas, see to it that the screen is full to the gunwales with the galaxy's best inventions yet.

Kids, with their wriggling love of the really gross, may have the best time with

Jabba the Hutt and his netherworld attendants. Hutt, you may remember, is the owner of a life-size wall decoration that is really our dashing Han Solo, now bronzed as a baby shoe. (OK, OK, carbon frozen.) Our tour of the nastier corners of Jabba's world is a smart move; it gives the film dimension. We can see for ourselves just what the Rebels oppose.

Adults, on the other hand, are likely to fall heavily for the small, furry Ewoks, who make *Return of the Jedi* feel like *The Teddy Bears' Picnic*. These cuddly, tree-dwelling primitives from the redwood-forested planet of Endor have all sorts of

jobs; there are noble bowmen, a shaman mother and babies. But their true function is to link the Rebels to a real (if calculatedly adorable) world with simple beginnings, and this they do effortlessly.

Did we lose the adults in this tour of fantasyland? Possibly, but not Luke and Princess Leia. Mark Hamill's Luke has the greatest shading and the greatest growth of the whole crew, as befits a heroically scaled alter ego. The crucial matter of the relationship between Luke and Darth Vader is worked out in a manner that may even move audiences.

Carrie Fisher's Leia can now at least



be looked upon as both a princess and a sexy woman, although slave girl drag is a pretty funny way to convey that information. The paths opened for Leia by the film's newest revelation are what really count, although, unfortunately, they come a little late in this cycle for actress Fisher.

The actors, actually, have to grab what chances they have to flesh out their characters. *Jedi* is fast, crammed filmmaking that gives us few chances to assess our feelings before it hurtles on to something new and dazzling. Even more than the previous two films, *Jedi* is a technician's tour de Force.

The overall production design, from

the nighttime coziness of Ewokville to Jabba's disgusting dungeons, was created by Norman Reynolds. Its visual effects range from small-scale puzzlers, like the landing of the Emperor's ship on a mirrorlike surface (without telltale wires in the reflection), to the frankly amazing, like the final blast of the Death Star. They are the work of Richard Edlund, Dennis Muren and Ken Ralston, magicians all.

The makeup was created by Stuart Freeborn, and Phil Tippett designed all

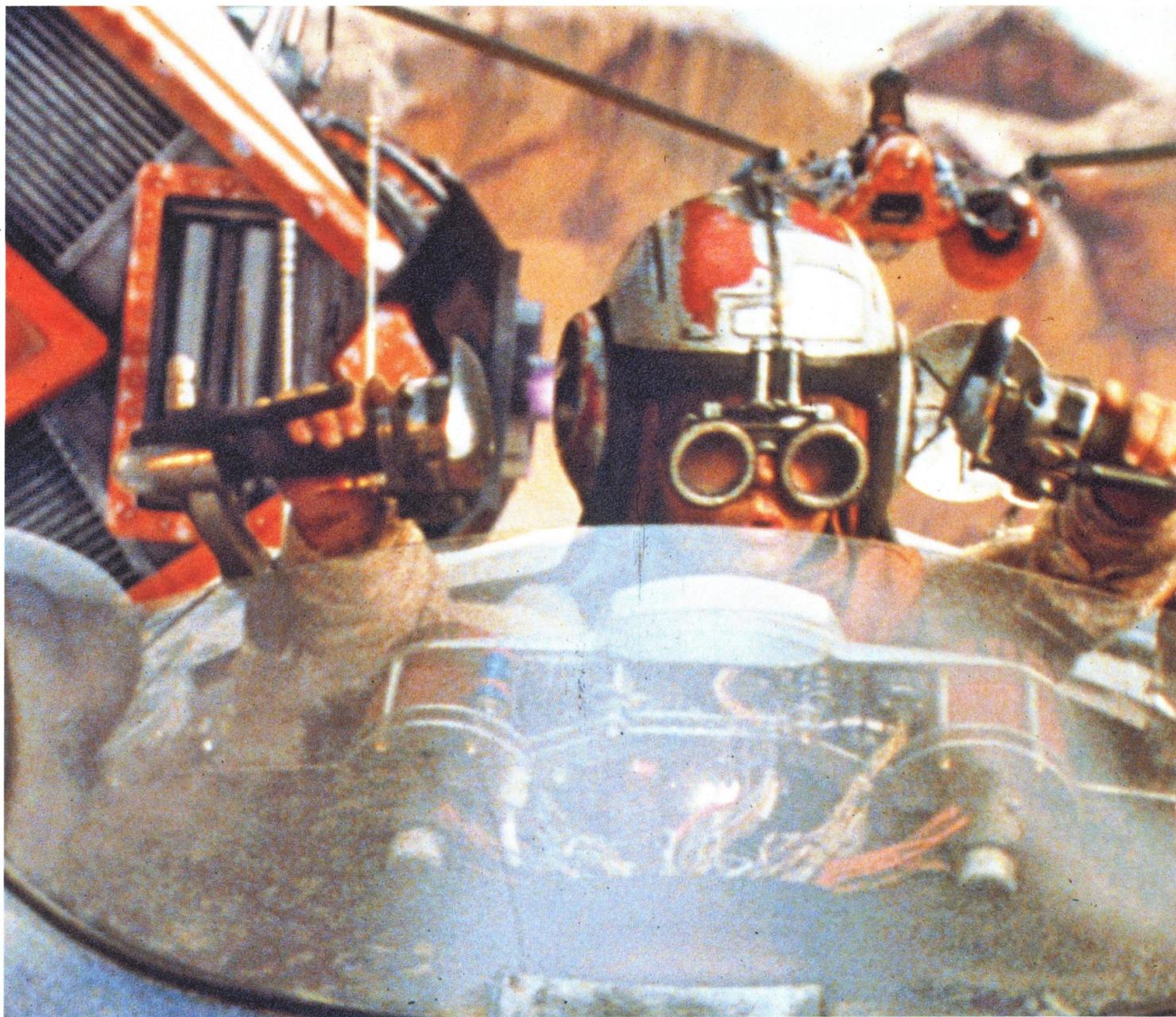
the film's extraordinary special creatures, while Kit West supervised their mechanical effects.

Alan Hume was the cinematographer, Aggie Guerard Rodgers and Nilo Rodis-Jamero the costume designers, and John Williams' music, an integral part of the romance of the galaxy, is again to be heard.

Finally, for any audience who knows the territory, *Jedi*'s redwood forests and adventurous rebels may represent the ultimate Marin County subliminal message. •



INDESTRUCTIBLE HAN
Han Solo was reportedly going to face a heroic death in *Jedi* during a raid on an Imperial base, but George Lucas changed his mind (likely influenced by toy profits).



EPISODE I

The Phantom Menace

The prequel trilogy presented the origin stories of Anakin Skywalker, Obi-Wan Kenobi and the Sith plan to overthrow democracy.

Director: George Lucas

Release date: May 19, 1999

ANAKIN SKYWALKER (aka the future Darth Vader), a young slave on Tatooine with a penchant for electronics, is discovered by Jedi Qui-Gon Jinn and Obi-Wan Kenobi to be an exceptionally strong wielder of the Force. Meanwhile, the Jedi's evil counterparts, the Sith, have resurfaced and begun a behind-the-scenes campaign to rule the galaxy.

Original Los Angeles Times review by Kenneth Turan

Over the 20-plus years since its release, George Lucas' *Star Wars* has influenced so many lives that the writer-director's friend Francis



Far left: Jake Lloyd played 9-year-old Anakin Skywalker, whose gifts included a knack for podracing. McGregor and Neeson (above) joined forces with Natalie Portman (left) as Queen Amidala of the planet Naboo.

Ford Coppola suggested, more or less seriously, that he turn its philosophy into an organized religion.

Whatever its virtues, and it certainly has them, *Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace* is not going to change anyone's life or method of worship. Unlike its illustrious predecessor, this film was not able to sneak into America's consciousness on tiny intergalactic feet. Instead, it had its arrival trumpeted on the cover of just about every magazine except the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

But even without the prerelease hoopla, *The Phantom Menace* would

be a considerable letdown, as Lucas and company either misjudged or did not care to recreate key aspects of what made *Star Wars* a phenomenon. While the new film is certainly serviceable, it's noticeably lacking in warmth and humor, and though its visual strengths are real and considerable, from a dramatic point of view, it's ponderous and plodding.

In Ewan McGregor, who plays Obi-Wan Kenobi in his youthful apprentice years, *The Phantom Menace* does have an actor with the

zest and twinkle this film desperately needs. But McGregor's lively light is hidden under a basket and the film unhesitatingly given over to the glum philosophizing of Liam Neeson's Jedi master Qui-Gon Jinn.

The Phantom Menace is certainly adequate. It's just that the tale it tells isn't all that interesting; in fact, if Lucas wasn't partial to the idea of trilogies, *Phantom* could have been condensed down to a brief prologue tacked onto the beginning of the next installment. ●



THE TRUE MENACE

Despite the film's focus on Anakin, the real "phantom menace," according to Lucas, is Palpatine (Ian McDiarmid), a Sith lord masquerading as a politician.



EPISODE II

Attack of the Clones

Anakin's Jedi training got sidetracked by forbidden love, and the threat of war grew as the Sith continued to gain power.

Director: George Lucas
Release date: May 16, 2002

PADAWAN ANAKIN Skywalker, now grown up, must choose between his Jedi duty and the love of Senator Padmé Amidala. Across the galaxy, Obi-Wan Kenobi uncovers a sinister plot to create an army of clones to be used in a war against the Republic.

Original Los Angeles Times review by Kenneth Turan

We'll never see another *Star Wars*, no matter how much we want to. And we want to very much. But like the cherished passions of first love, the fervor called forth by the landmark film is never coming back, and no amount of prequels or sequels is going to change that. Paradoxically, the fact that the



A group of Jedi—including Mace Windu (center)—faced the Separatists' army of droids on the planet Geonosis.

latest prequel, *Star Wars: Episode II—Attack of the Clones*, is a bit better than its predecessor makes it clear how lacking in the things that matter these newcomers are.

Given its huffy 9-year-old protagonist and off-putting characters like Jar Jar Binks, *The Phantom Menace* was anything but a tough act to follow. Picking up the adventures of Anakin Skywalker 10 years later, *Clones* has more menace and less Jar Jar, better battles and an impressive parade of eye-catching splendors. But like the Tin Man, *The Wizard of Oz*'s C-3PO predecessor, it doesn't have much of a heart. Writer-director George Lucas' gift for animating the inanimate turns out to

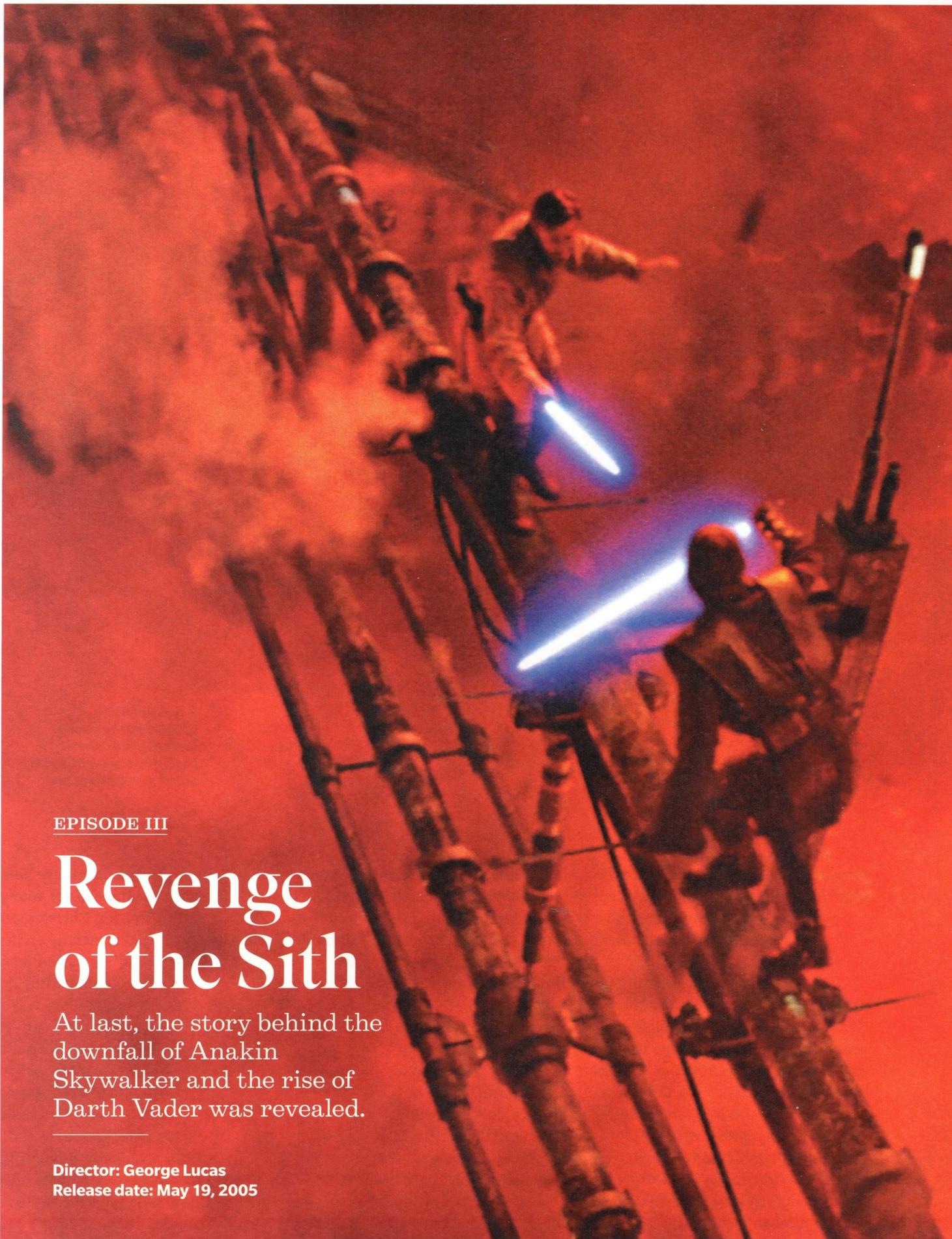
be paralleled by a tendency to deaden what should be completely alive.

It is the pictorial element of *Clones* that makes the biggest impact. Production designer Gavin Bocquet, aided by four visual-effects supervisors, three concept design supervisors, an animation director and a previsualization and effects co-supervisor (no, I don't know what that is either), has created some truly involving alternative universes, and costume designer Trisha Biggar has figured out what should be worn in each of them.

Judging by his performance here (perhaps not a wise thing to do), young Canadian actor Hayden Christensen was picked for Anakin strictly on his ability to radiate sullen teen rebellion, something he does a lot.

Everything inevitably ends in a climactic battle. Impressive though the computer work is, it soon descends into video-game overkill. Only a teenage boy could find this kind of stuff continually diverting, and only a teenage boy would not notice flimsy emotions and underdeveloped acting. •

PURPLE REIGN
While most Jedi lightsaber blades are blue or green, Mace Windu's was amethyst because actor Samuel L. Jackson requested it.

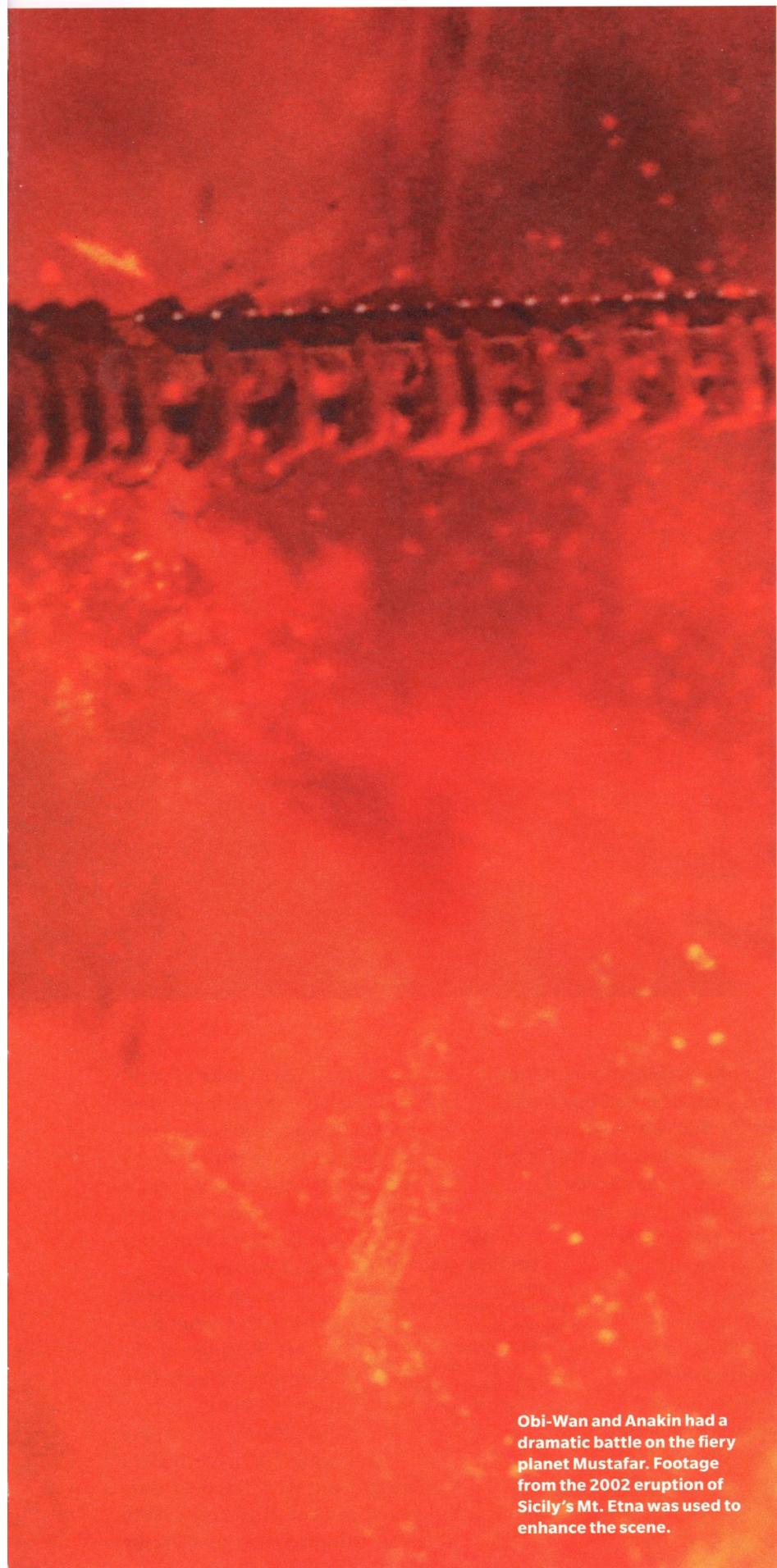


EPISODE III

Revenge of the Sith

At last, the story behind the downfall of Anakin Skywalker and the rise of Darth Vader was revealed.

Director: George Lucas
Release date: May 19, 2005



Obi-Wan and Anakin had a dramatic battle on the fiery planet Mustafar. Footage from the 2002 eruption of Sicily's Mt. Etna was used to enhance the scene.

FACED WITH haunting premonitions that his secret wife, Padmé Amidala, is going to die, Anakin Skywalker is seduced by the dark side, turning against his master Obi-Wan and helping to topple the Jedi before finally becoming Darth Vader.

Original Los Angeles Times review by Kenneth Turan

Never but never underestimate the power of the dark side of the Force. It has made *Episode III—Revenge of the Sith* into easily the best of the trio of Star Wars prequels and has even attempted the tougher assignment of saving writer-director George Lucas from himself.

Because it contains the creation myth of one of the most durably popular films of our time, and because seeing a potential hero torn between good and evil before succumbing to iniquity is always involving, *Revenge of the Sith* is the most energetic of the prequels, the only one at all worth watching. But that doesn't mean it is without the weaknesses that scuttled its pair of predecessors. Quite the contrary.

Revenge begins with one of its areas of strength, combat on screen. An elaborate multipart action sequence lasts for close to half an hour and shows that the droids at Industrial Light & Magic have made excellent use of the film's more than 2,200 visual-effects shots.

Given how strong *Revenge*'s purely visual element is, we leave it with reluctance when the film turns to dialogue to explain a plot that involves not only the Republic's war with the Sith but a power struggle between the Chancellor and the Jedi Council.

That reluctance does nothing but intensify, because, as veterans of the last two films can attest, whatever gift Lucas had for dialogue has deserted him. The language in *Revenge* is banal and stilted, with sentiments of the



"Let's get a move on, we have a battle to win here" variety predominating. Given that one of Lucas' original inspirations was Saturday-afternoon serials (hence his insistence on numbering all six parts), it makes one wonder if the language is intentionally bad, the better to echo the spirit of those long-gone matinees of the golden past.

Lucas' weakness with words is matched by a marked lack of facility for working with actors, especially where emotional scenes are concerned. That limitation tends to flatten out everyone's performance (has Samuel L. Jackson ever been this bland, Ewan McGregor this uncharismatic?), but it completely cripples the work of poor Natalie Portman as Anakin's pregnant

but still hairdo-challenged wife, Padmé.

George Lucas does not seem to care. He owns the *Star Wars* concept outright and clearly feels that this is his world to do with as he pleases. If

he wants to put in lines that sound as if they reflect as much on the current political situation as the one in the future—as when Padmé listens to the Senate cheer and says, "This is how liberty dies, with thunderous applause"—he does. Lucas must feel he's earned the right to be this way, and from one point of view, he has.

Although the *Star Wars* universe

wouldn't exist if Lucas hadn't fought for it and taken it more seriously than anyone else, he seems to be taking it so seriously today that the raffish energy and wised-up sense of humor that marked the very first *Star Wars* is completely gone from the scene.

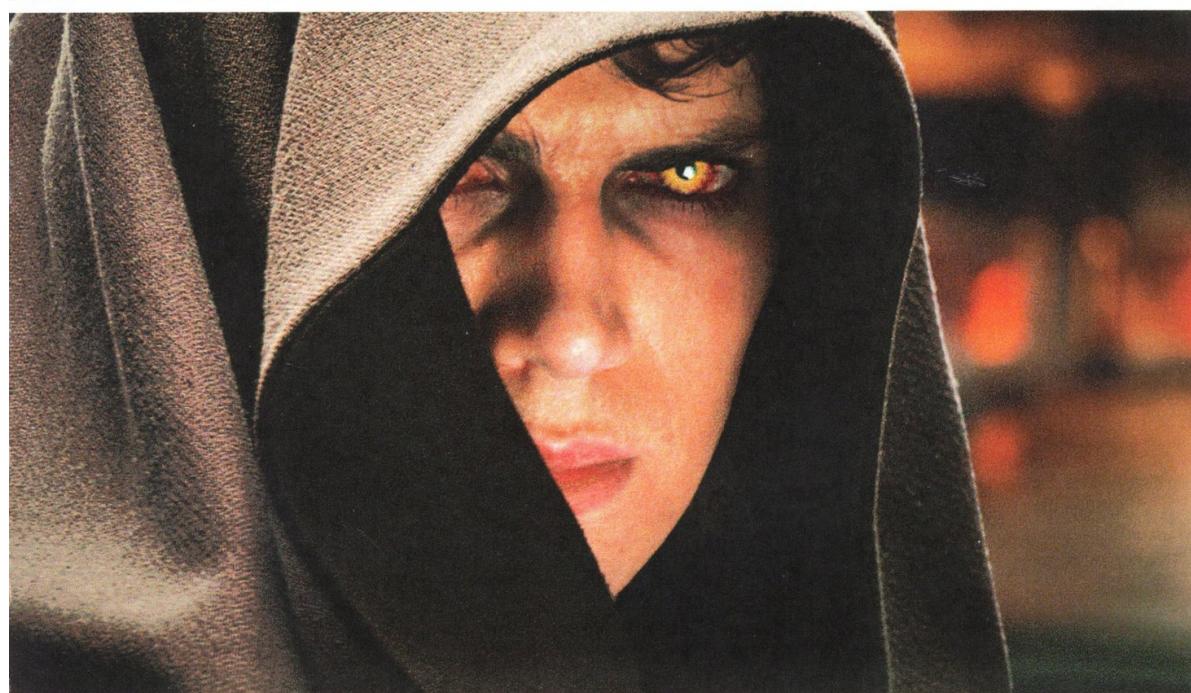
Though the return of Darth Vader provides *Revenge of the Sith* with a classic film moment that lives up to expectations, the people we'd really like to see make a comeback are Mark Hamill, Carrie Fisher and, most of all, Harrison Ford.

It is not to be, of course, but that only makes us miss them even more. ●



HELPING HAND

George Lucas recruited his good friend Steven Spielberg to help direct some sequences in *Revenge of the Sith*, including the climactic duel between Anakin and Obi-Wan.



Above: The Invisible Hand battleship was taken down by the Jedi, thwarting a Separatist plot to kidnap the Supreme Chancellor.
Left: Anakin completed his transformation from Jedi to Sith.

EPISODE VII

The Force Awakens

The sequel trilogy began with a mix of franchise veterans and plucky first-timers.

Director: J.J. Abrams

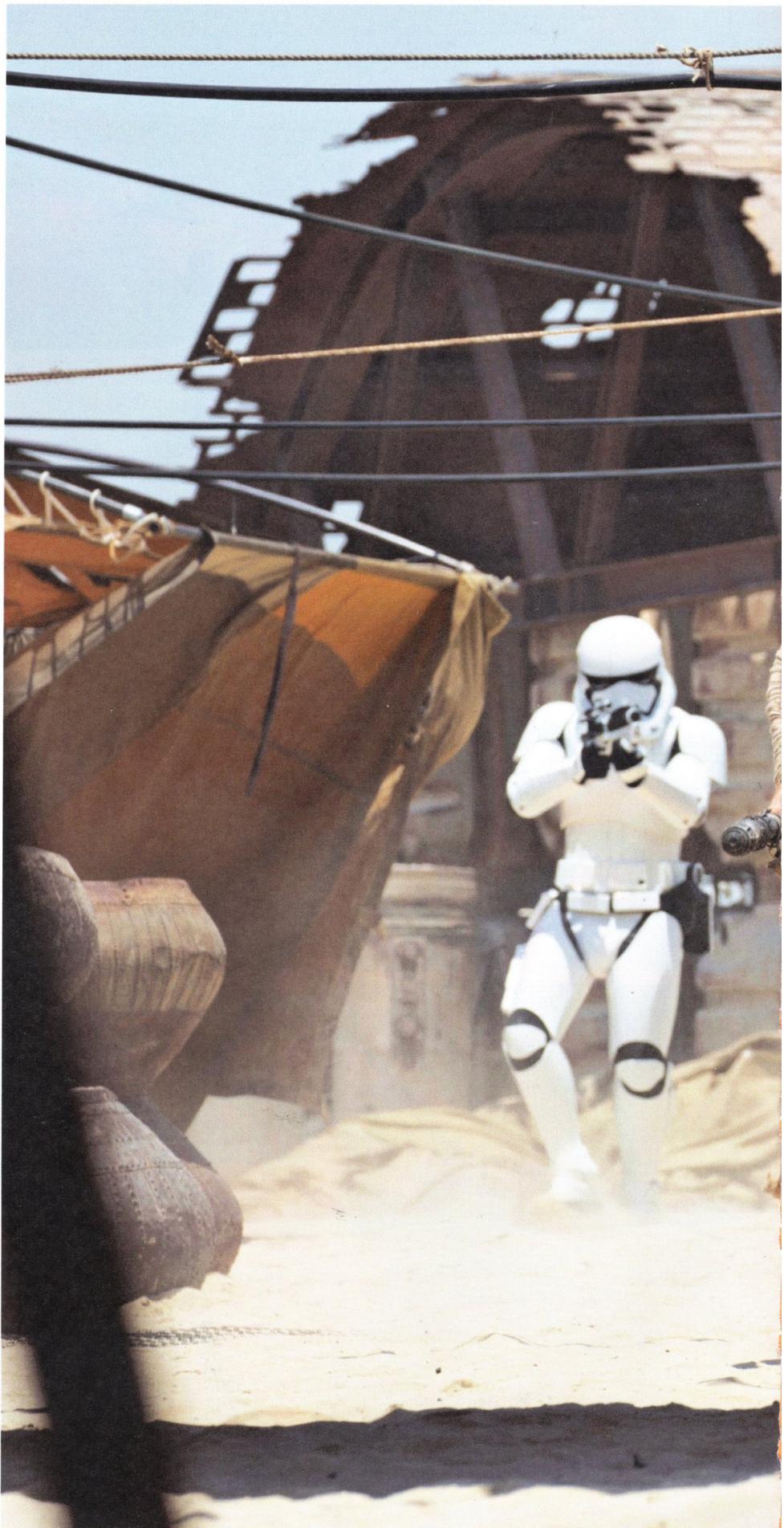
Release date: December 18, 2015

THIRTY YEARS after the defeat of the Empire, Luke Skywalker has vanished, and a new threat has risen: the First Order, led by the mysterious Supreme Leader Snoke (Andy Serkis) and his dark side apprentice, Kylo Ren (Adam Driver), aka Ben Solo, the son of Leia Organa and Han Solo. The onetime princess, now General Organa, leads the militaristic Resistance, the galaxy's only hope for thwarting the new evil. The mysterious scavenger Rey (Daisy Ridley) joins their ranks and soon discovers her ties to the Force.

Original Los Angeles Times review by Kenneth Turan

Can the eager first-day viewers of *The Force Awakens* trailer, who saw it 112 million times online, be all wrong? What about the true believers who purchased \$50 million and counting worth of advance tickets—can they be mistaken about this film too? No, they're not, but they can be only half right, which is what they turn out to be.

Perhaps inevitably, this, the most





Rey and ex-stormtrooper Finn (John Boyega) had barely met when they were on the run from the First Order on Jakku.



Top: The Millennium Falcon (piloted by Rey) evaded the First Order on Jakku. **Above, left:** The menacing Kylo Ren was torn between the love of his parents (Leia and Han, right) and the pull of the dark side of the Force.

hotly anticipated motion picture since *Gone with the Wind*, has an erratic, haphazard quality to it.

Director J.J. Abrams and fellow screenwriters Lawrence Kasdan and Michael Arndt have come up with some potent new characters and outstanding moments. When all goes as partisans hoped it would, you're glad you're in the room.... But *The Force Awakens* is also burdened by casting miscalculations and scenes that are flat and ineffective. Sometimes the Force is with this film, sometimes it decidedly is not. That hit-and-miss quality was likely unavoidable, given that Abrams

and company needed to please different masters and satisfy diverse audiences in this story of a search for mysteriously missing Luke Skywalker.

At its best, *The Force Awakens* basks in the presence of an altogether splendid Harrison Ford, who, unlike original costars Carrie Fisher and Mark Hamill, has a full-fledged, rip-roaring leading role rather than a cameo. Until he checks in midway through the film, appropriately craggy and battle weary,

and elevates everyone's game, the pickings are slim.

Ford has been here before, and it shows. His "It's all true" speech, featured in the trailer, is a highlight, and his scene kind of offering Jakku scavenger Rey (Ridley, the brightest of the film's new cast members) a job is the film's intergenerational high spot. Too bad all of *The Force Awakens* can't be that way, but even in galaxies far, far away, things don't always go as planned. ●

GAME ON!
The holochess console in the Millennium Falcon that Finn accidentally turns on resumes the same game that Chewbacca and R2-D2 were playing in *A New Hope*.

In Harmony with the Force

Oscar-winning composer John Williams created (and continually updated) the triumphant score for the Skywalker saga.

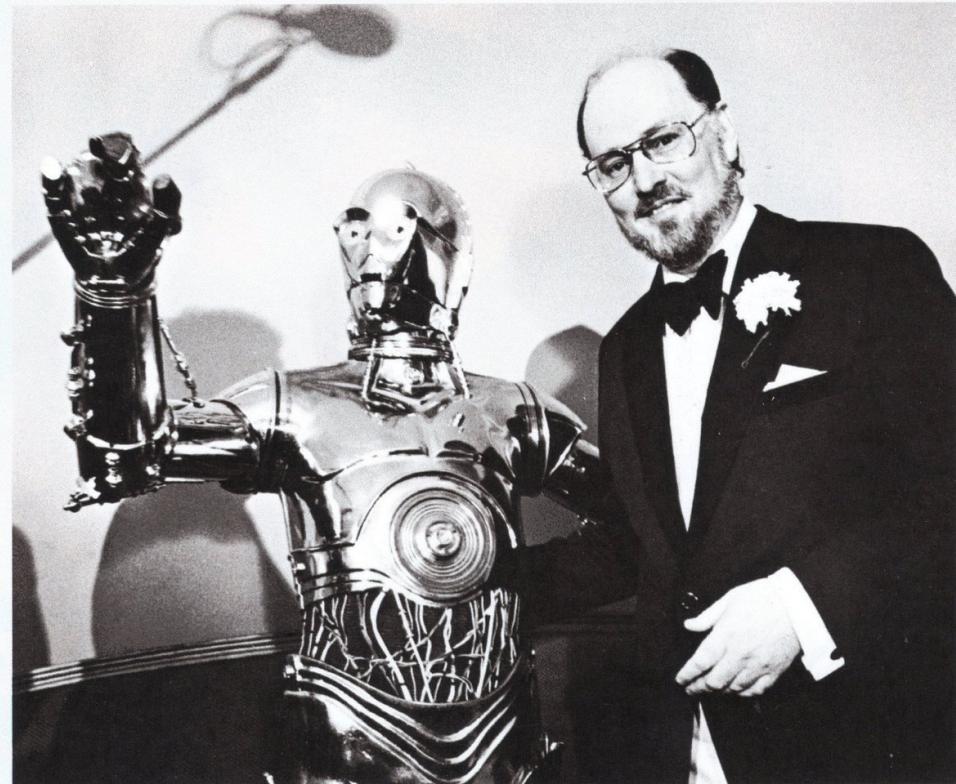
BY TIM GREIVING

Star Wars without John Williams would be like the Skywalker family without the Force: missing much of its power. Williams has given the sci-fi series its musical lifeblood from its introduction with *Star Wars* in 1977 through *The Rise of Skywalker* in 2019. He has composed a space opera on a Wagnerian scale—densely packed with iconic character themes and grand dramaturgy.

"I'm just lucky," he told the *Times* in 2015, when *The Force Awakens* was released. "As far as I know, that's a unique opportunity. It would be like writing an opera and then writing six more based on the same kind of material and the same story... over the course of 40 years." The Star Wars main title theme is one of many notable cinematic compositions by Williams, along with iconic music from *Jaws*, *Superman*, *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* and the *Jurassic Park* and *Harry Potter* franchises.

It's no surprise that, after agreeing to direct *The Force Awakens*, J.J. Abrams asked Williams to have dinner with him. Would the composer want to come back for another round? "I didn't have any reservations about it at all," Williams said. "I thought it would be great fun."

The winner of five Academy Awards (and 52 nominations), including one for scoring the original *Star Wars*, said he was enthused by Abrams' youthful energy and Lawrence



The Times's 1977 review of *Star Wars* praised "a score of unstinting dimension, soaring string sections and thundering basses and brilliant horns, which, performed by the London Symphony Orchestra for the superlative sound system, lifts you out of your seat."

Kasdan's light, witty script. "Working with J.J. was certainly invigorating," he said. "I felt that he had made [the film] consistently and organically related to George Lucas' incredibly original vision.... My task and my challenge was to make it feel friendly and interrelated to the other scores, so that it feels comfortably Star Wars-ian, if you can use that word, and at the same time be new and original to this particular piece." He did this by maintaining the same basic

vocabulary established in the previous films—a Romantic symphonic language deliberately used, initially, to root the far-flung epic firmly in the familiar.

The presence of a Williams score is a boon to Abrams' strategic marriage of old and new. But what has *Star Wars* given back to the serious, Juilliard-trained composer, when even the "serious" gala tribute to him by the Los Angeles Philharmonic in 2014 was interrupted by march-

ing stormtroopers? "I've always felt really lucky to be associated with this piece," Williams said. "I can only say that I'm enormously grateful that people have embraced this music, and it's brought them to orchestral music in the way that it has for many younger people. I don't make a particular distinction between 'high art' and 'low art.' Music is there for everybody. It's a river we can all put our cups into and drink it, and be sustained by it."



EPISODE VIII

The Last Jedi

Luke Skywalker returned (reluctantly) to train Rey in the ways of the Force and face off against his conflicted nephew, Kylo Ren.

Director: Rian Johnson

Release date: December 15, 2017

THE FIRST ORDER'S Supreme Leader, Snoke, the latest Sith lord, looks to crush what's left of the Resistance. But hope survives: Rey convinces Luke Skywalker to come out of exile and help save her allies. In his final act, Luke holds off Kylo Ren long enough for Leia and her depleted team to escape.

*Original Los Angeles Times review
by Justin Chang*

The Last Jedi begins with a typically noisy and dazzling space battle. Even amid the ensuing laser-light spectacular, director Rian Johnson quickly gives the proceedings a



Far left: Finn battled his nemesis, the First Order's Captain Phasma (Gwendoline Christie). **Above:** Rey began her Jedi training with Luke (left) on the remote planet Ahch-To.

human pulse, sending dashing pilot Poe Dameron (Oscar Isaac) into the fray and integrating a high-stakes suspense sequence that sets a crucial subplot in motion.

Poe's impulsive streak brings him into conflict with the wise General Leia Organa (in a gratifyingly substantial role that Carrie Fisher finished shooting before her death) and her formidable deputy, Vice Admiral Amilyn Holdo (Laura Dern, a fierce, purple-haired enigma). Due to some ingenious innovations in lightspeed technology, the Resistance fleet can no longer outrun the First Order. So it falls to the reformed ex-

stormtrooper Finn and a ship maintenance worker, Rose Tico (Kelly Marie Tran, an excellent newcomer), to embark on a dangerous mission to turn the tide.

The most compelling of the movie's three interwoven plotlines is the one that picks up where *The Force Awakens* left off, with Rey, possible heir to the long-dormant Jedi mantle, coming face-to-face with the elusive Luke Skywalker. Luke, haunted by personal demons, has no intention of coming out of hiding,

and his stubbornness establishes an immediately engaging dynamic between the eager young upstart and her reluctant mentor.

Mark Hamill's career may never have fully escaped Luke's long shadow, but somewhere along the way he morphed into a pretty terrific character actor. In *The Last Jedi*, his unexpected gravitas, offset by a faint twinkle of humor, acts as a kind of veteran's seal of approval, setting the tone for fine performances across the board. ●

PHASMA LIVES
Captain Phasma appeared to perish in *The Force Awakens*, but a Marvel Comics miniseries revealed how she escaped Starkiller Base and covered up her role in its destruction.

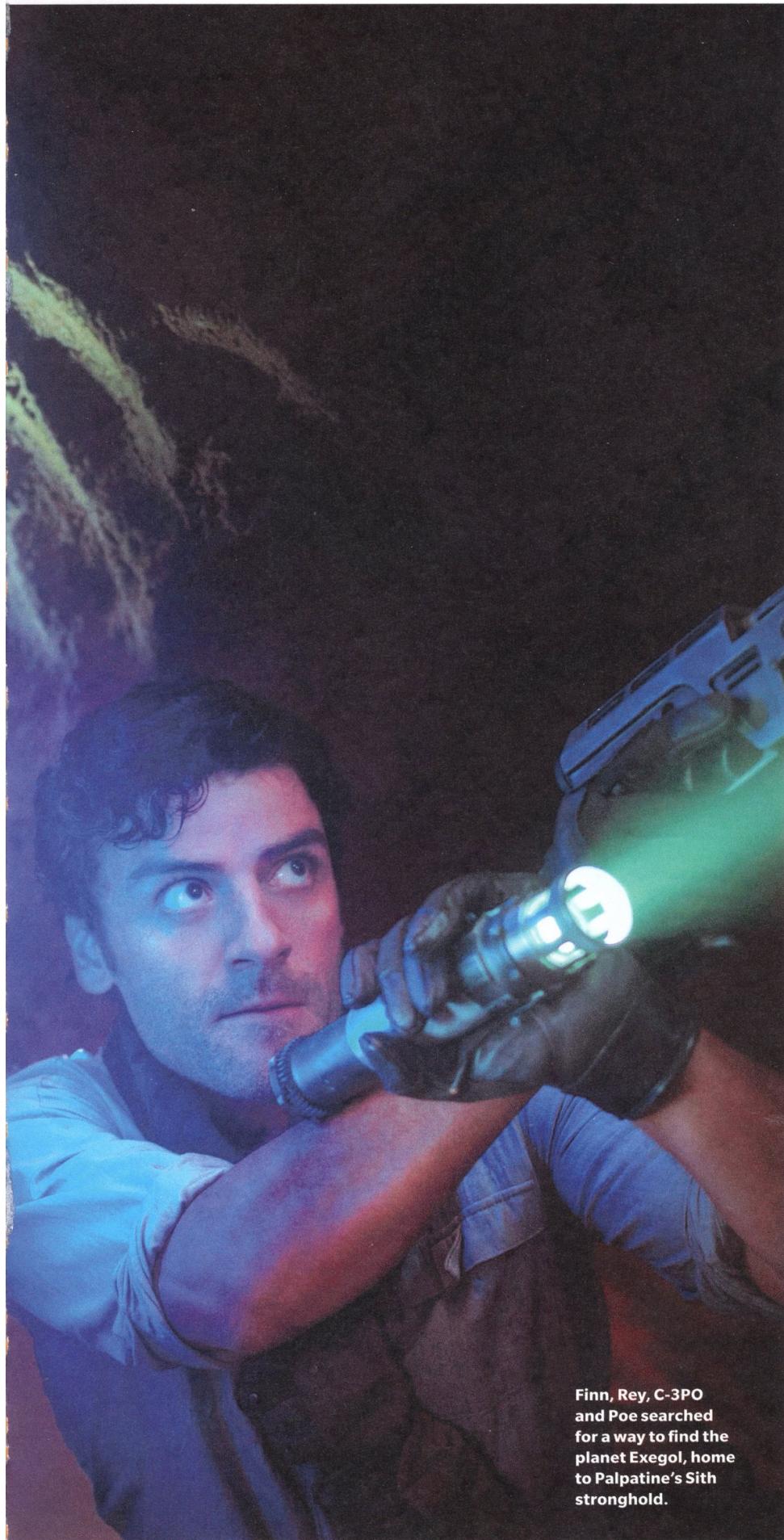
EPISODE IX

The Rise of Skywalker

The saga's final chapter featured a returning villain, a heartbreakingly death and the Jedi's final hope.

Director: J.J. Abrams
Release date: December 20, 2019





Finn, Rey, C-3PO and Poe searched for a way to find the planet Exegol, home to Palpatine's Sith stronghold.

PALPATINE IS ALIVE! The former Emperor (Ian McDiarmid) is ready to give Kylo Ren ultimate power in a new Empire, upgrading the First Order to the Final Order. But that's not the only surprise related to Palpatine: Rey learns that she is his granddaughter. Meanwhile, Leia reaches out to her son, Ren, through the Force, and while it helps convince him to work with Rey to defeat Palpatine, the energy she uses costs the general her life. After Palpatine is defeated and his forces are destroyed, Rey takes the surname Skywalker to continue the legacy of Luke and Leia.

Original Los Angeles Times review by Justin Chang

“The dead speak!” Those three words, crawling up the screen in familiar yellow letters, are the first thing we see in *The Rise of Skywalker*, the frenzied big-bang finish of the latest and likely not last Star Wars trilogy. There are ominous signs that Emperor Palpatine, the vile Sith lord vanquished at the end of 1983’s *Return of the Jedi*, may be staging a comeback from beyond the grave. But if the dead can speak, they can also give us cause for tentative optimism and maybe, yes, a new hope: With any luck, perhaps the deep, transporting pleasure of vintage Star Wars might somehow be resurrected.

It’s a promise that director J.J. Abrams, who wrote the script with Chris Terrio, desperately tries to fulfill with every weapon in his crowd-pleasing arsenal. Beloved characters laid to rest in earlier installments return as phantom projections. In



the movie's most poignant trick, the late Carrie Fisher gives her final performance as Leia Organa, one of the foundational figures of a saga that launched to paradigm-shattering popularity 42 years ago.

Abrams originally filmed Fisher's scenes for *The Force Awakens*, which established this trilogy's central conflict between the evil First Order and the scrappy, heroic Resistance. That movie also introduced three appealing leads—Rey, a desert scavenger with Jedi potential; Finn, an ex-stormtrooper who joined the Resistance; and Poe Dameron, a dashing Resistance pilot—and threw them into a familiar rebel narrative that consciously if not always imaginatively evoked the 1977 *Star Wars*.

The Force Awakens made a nice warm-up for Rian Johnson's *The Last Jedi*, which distinguished itself as the most thrilling and audacious new Star Wars picture since *The Empire Strikes Back*, if also, tellingly, the most divisive. What some of us regarded as clear storytelling virtues—a tough-minded view of



Rey and her crew track the Sith wayfinder (a kind of mystical compass) to a moon of Endor, where she has a game-changing duel with Kylo Ren on the destroyed Death Star.

heroism; a fresh, irreverent approach to an overworked fantasy mythology; probably the greatest performance of Mark Hamill's career—were rejected as heresy by a noisy faction of the Star Wars faithful.

I suspect that more than a few fans who were incensed by *The Last Jedi* and its refusal to pander to their every expectation will be grateful to see Abrams re-en- sconced in the director's chair. Even if you simply watch the movie and ignore some of the controversy-stir-

JEDI CALL TO ARMS
The disembodied voices rallying Rey for her showdown with Palpatine include Anakin Skywalker, Obi-Wan Kenobi, Mace Windu, Qui-Gon Jinn, Yoda and Luke Skywalker.

ring prerelease chatter, *The Rise of Skywalker* nakedly offers itself up in the spirit of a *Last Jedi* corrective, a return to storytelling basics, a nearly two-and-a-half-hour compendium of everything that made you fall in love with Star Wars in the first place.

The more accurate way to de- scribe it, I think, is as an epic failure of nerve. This *Rise* feels more like a retreat, a return to a zone of emotional and thematic safety from a filmmaker with a gift for packaging nostalgia as subversion. Still, let's acknowledge Abrams for the proficient craftsman and genre-savvy showman he is. •

Who Lived and Who Died

The status update as of Episode IX's closing credits.

The 40-plus-year Skywalker saga came to a close in 2019 with the release of *Episode IX—The Rise of Skywalker*, the final installment in the sequel trilogy. The film focused on Rey and her journey as the next great Force-sensitive hero. Ultimately, she became the newest Jedi and adopted the Skywalker surname—after teaming up with nemesis Kylo Ren (Adam Driver), born Ben Solo, the last remaining member of the Skywalker bloodline—in the film's final act.

Star Wars movies tend to have a high (non-bloody) body count, as they revolve around an intergalactic space war, but most of the casualties are characters whose names you may not remember. Here's a quick roll call of who died and survived as we await any potential future adventures of the Skywalker variety. But remember: "No one's ever really gone."

Rey: Alive—with a new last name she picked for herself.

Kylo Ren/Ben Solo: Dead after ditching the dark side to help Rey.

Finn: Alive.

Poe Dameron: Alive.

Leia Organa: Dead, but what she stood for lives on.

Luke Skywalker: Was already dead (since *The Last Jedi*); stayed dead, but available for Force-ghost pep talks.

Han Solo: Dead (since *The Force Awakens*).

Rose Tico: Alive.

Jannah: Alive and ready for a spinoff.

Zorii Bliss: Surprise! She survived the destruction of Kijimi.

Palpatine: Dead—hopefully for good this time.

General Hux: Died as he lived—hating Kylo Ren.

Lando Calrissian: Alive.

Chewbacca: Alive.

C-3PO: Alive, with most of his memories intact.

R2-D2: Alive.

BB-8: Alive.

D-0: Alive.

Maz Kanata: Alive.

Lt. Connix: Alive.

Babu Frik: Alive to kill us with his cuteness.

Snap Wexley: Dead (even though Greg Grunberg is one of J.J. Abrams's lifelong friends).

Beaumont Kin: Yes, Dominic Monaghan's character had a name. And he's alive.

Allegiant Gen. Pryde: Exploded (dead).

Boolio: Beheaded (probably dead).

Rey's parents: Mystery solved, but still dead.

Knights of Ren: Killed by Ben.

Millennium Falcon: Alive, and still the fastest hunk of junk in the galaxy.

Luke's lightsaber: Laid to rest, but probably more hibernating than dead.

Porgs: Alive.

Ewoks: Alive.

Inhabitants of the planet Kijimi: Most likely dead.

Numerous unnamed Resistance fighters: All dead.

Countless troopers on all Final Order Destroyers: All dead.

The Skywalker Saga:

Concluded (for now).

The Force: With us always.



Kylo Ren (aka Ben Solo)



Zorii Bliss (Keri Russell)



BB-8 and D-O



Jannah (Naomi Ackie)

Cassian, Jyn and K-2SO's mission to steal the Death Star schematics climaxed on the tropical planet Scarif, guarded by stormtroopers (opposite).



A STAR WARS STORY

Rogue One

An unlikely team of rebels assembled for a clandestine mission that led directly into the events of the original *Star Wars*.

Director: Gareth Edwards
Release date: December 16, 2016

SET IMMEDIATELY before the events of *A New Hope*, this stand-alone adventure reveals how the Rebellion managed to acquire the plans to the Death Star, allowing Luke Skywalker and company to blow it up.

Original Los Angeles Times review by Justin Chang

Even as it introduces a host of appealing new characters, the story told in *Rogue One* could hardly be more bracingly familiar: A scrappy, determined band of Rebel Alliance fighters comes together to embark on a Darth-defying wartime mission. Director Gareth Edwards, working from a script by Chris Weitz and Tony Gilroy, serves up several dynamic action sequences,



some pretty good jokes and a few moments that immediately ascend to classic status.

Leading the mission this time is Jyn Erso (Felicity Jones), a defiant young warrior whom we first encounter as a young girl being cruelly separated from her parents. After her scientist father, Galen Erso (Mads Mikkelsen), is taken prisoner by the ambitious Imperial leader Orson Krennic (Ben Mendelsohn), Jyn spends the next few years being raised and trained by Rebel extremist Saw Gerrera (Forest Whitaker).

Hoping to reunite with her father and unravel the dastardly scheme in which he has been forcibly enlisted, Jyn finds a reluctant ally in Cassian

Andor (Diego Luna), an Alliance intelligence officer whose calculating streak makes him a credibly amoral hero. The team's secret weapon, distinguished by his intense devotion to the ways of the Force, is Chirrut Îmwe (Donnie Yen), a blind warrior seemingly modeled on the legendary Japanese swordsman Zatoichi.

Also along for the ride, zipping between desert moons and far-flung galactic outposts, are Chirrut's faithful comrade Baze Malbus (Jiang Wen) and Bodhi Rook (Riz Ahmed), an emotionally scarred cargo pilot with his own mysterious role to play. But the

requisite scene stealer is K-2SO, a tall, spindly-limbed droid who is hilariously voiced by Alan Tudyk.

A sense of dramatic convergence materializes during the pulse-quicken endgame, which offers the curious satisfaction of turning an unfinished story into a resonant pop-cultural moment. As the puzzle pieces snap into place, with a level of precision and economy that honors and even transcends the narrative foundation of *A New Hope*, *Rogue One* at last finds its own reason for being. For one thrilling final stretch, everything old really is new again. ●

PILOT PROGRAM

For the climactic battle, filmmakers incorporated unused footage of Rebellion X-wing pilots from *A New Hope* to strengthen the connection to the original story.

Solo

The charming young pilot darted through the galaxy's unseemly underworld, making friends and enemies along the way.

Director: Ron Howard

Release date: May 10, 2018

LONG BEFORE crossing paths with Luke Skywalker and Princess Leia, Han Solo was already well on his way to becoming the scoundrel and smuggler we know and love. This origin story/adventure reveals his fateful first meetings with Chewbacca and Lando Calrissian.

Original Los Angeles Times review
by Justin Chang

We first meet Han Solo (Alden Ehrenreich)—in this prequel to the original Star Wars trilogy—on his ugly home planet of Corellia, where he is one of several orphans slaving away for Lady Proxima (picture *Oliver Twist*'s Fagin crossed with that spaghetti growing mold in your refrigerator). Han and his girlfriend, Qi'ra (Emilia Clarke), are plotting their escape, but circumstances conspire to separate them. Three years later, Han, a skilled pilot stuck in a far-flung war zone, hasn't given up his dream of buying his own spaceship and reuniting with Qi'ra.

Before long he joins forces with two wily, cynical mercenaries, Tobias Beckett (Woody Harrelson) and Val (Thandie Newton), whose relationship with their employer, the ruthless gangster Dryden Vos (Paul

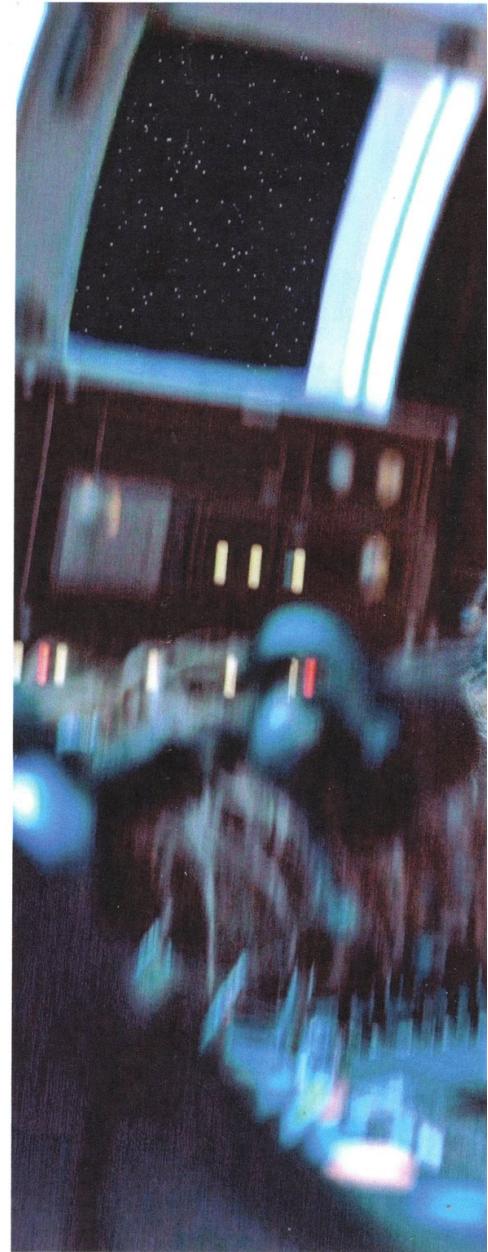
Bettany), foreshadows Han's future tussles with Jabba the Hutt. His talent for smooth-talking persistence already fully developed, Han succeeds in joining their mission.

To their credit, the writers have contrived a few clever twists and reversals as they steer Han to wherever he will spend his time waiting for the events of *A New Hope*.

There are, of course, some necessary boxes to check off, including a rookie-Wookiee meet-cute with Chewbacca (Joonas Suotamo), who at first seems more apt to eat Han for breakfast than to become his closest comrade and co-pilot on the Millennium Falcon. Speaking of which, fans will look forward to the fateful Sabacc game (or two) between Han and his new friend Lando Calrissian (Donald Glover).

Even these obligatory beats, however, scarcely register amid the movie's hectic swirl of sloppily cut-together action, as well as a pervasively gritty, downbeat atmosphere. What meager charms remain can be credited mainly to the actors, including Clarke, intriguingly reticent as a love interest and possible femme fatale. The intensely charismatic Glover

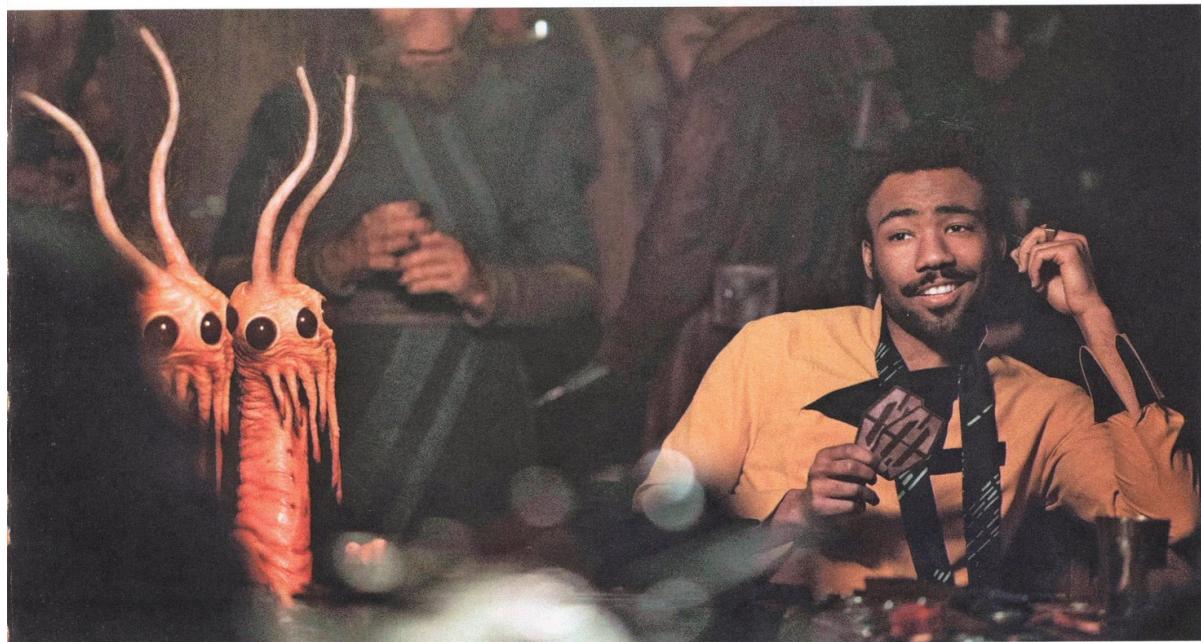
FAMILY AFFAIR
Ron Howard isn't the only member of his family to helm a Star Wars project: Daughter Bryce Dallas Howard has directed episodes of *The Mandalorian* and *The Book of Boba Fett*.



leaves you with every assurance that he will someday age into Billy Dee Williams.

The resemblance between Ehrenreich and Harrison Ford is more elusive, but also less important than you might suspect. This Han Solo may not scan as an exact younger replica of the character who has taken root in collective pop-cultural imagination, but there's more to good acting than fitting a physical type.

Ehrenreich isn't given much to work with here, but his sly comic reserve and devil-may-care attitude give you reasons to keep watching well after the story has stopped doing anything of the sort. ●



Above: Han and Chewbacca guided the Millennium Falcon through the famed Kessel Run smuggling route. Left: Han later won the ship from Lando in a high-stakes card game.



The original *Star Wars* still ranks 20th on the all-time domestic box office list. Here, Lucas worked with Anthony Daniels (C-3PO) on location in Tunisia in 1976.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

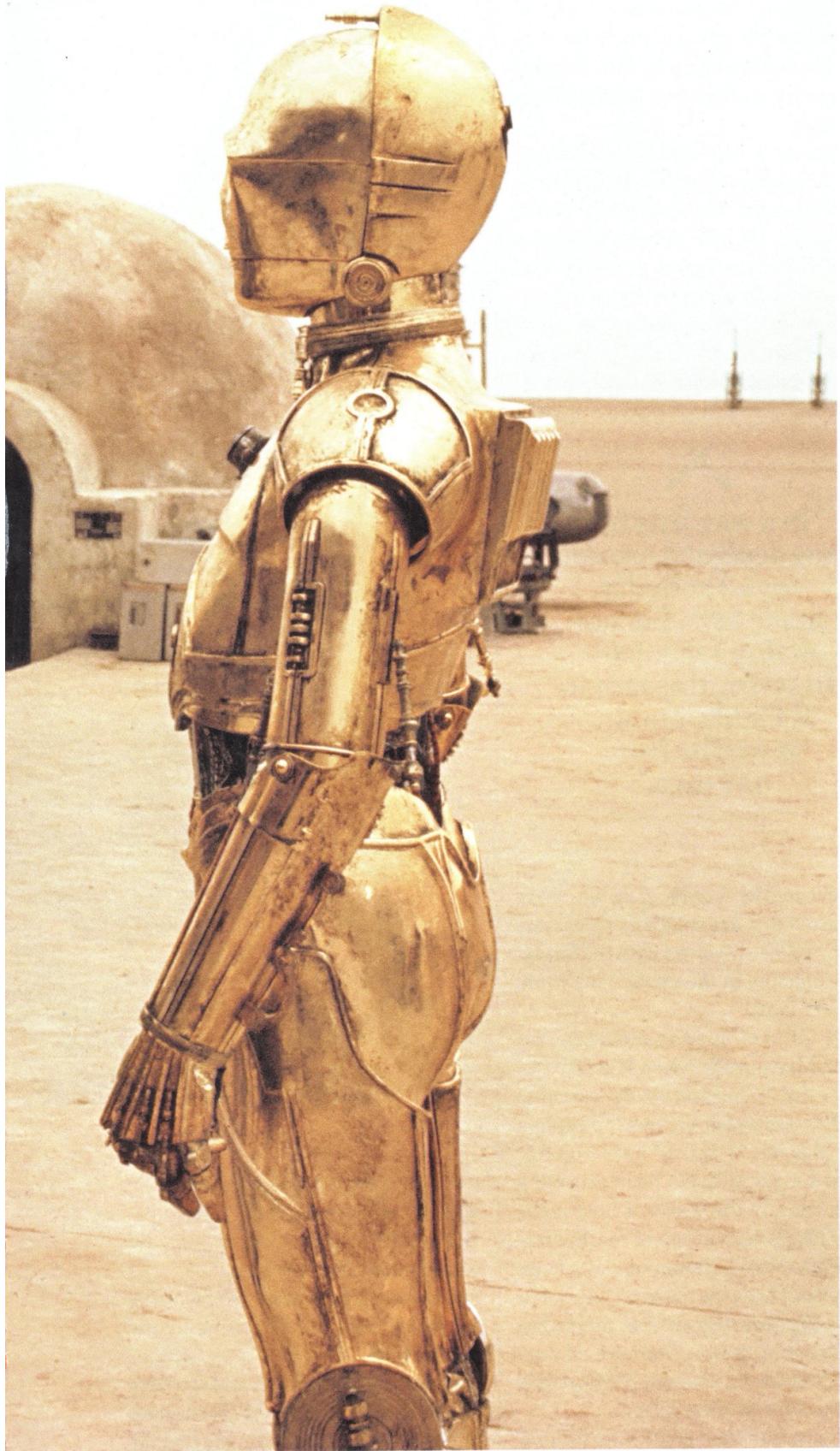
Ready for His Close-up

In a candid 1977 interview, George Lucas discussed the making of *Star Wars*.

BY PAUL ROSENFIELD

BEFORE THE FIRST-EVER *Star Wars* premiered on screens across America, Los Angeles Times writer Paul Rosenfield sat down with the creator of a galaxy far, far away. Then 33, George Lucas, just a few days before the release of his "space opera," prophetically claimed that *Star Wars* was the movie "Disney would have made when Walt Disney was alive." Who knew that decades later, the droids and the mouse would reside in the same castle? This story was originally published on June 5, 1977.

George Lucas was talking reel-to-reel. It had been a hard day's night of sound mixing at Goldwyn Studios. Five days before the opening of *Star Wars* and—gadzooks!—there was not yet an answer print. The writer-director-wizard was sharing the facilities with another hyphenate, Martin Scorsese. Both facing oncoming release dates, the men were responsible for a cumulative \$21 million in product. Lucas had the night shift—8 p.m. to 8 a.m. By day, he was in a Hollywood lab. Marcia Lucas, editor of both films and George's wife, remained calm.



"Can we meet for breakfast?" she asked her husband.

For George Lucas, the hype was about to happen. In the works was a *Time* magazine cover story, an incalculable profit and prestige boost for any film. Lucas would have been the first of the new tribe of directors to be so singled out. The Israeli election of Menachem Begin forced a last-minute switch in the magazine's front-page plans. Lucas expressed no chagrin.

The quiet craftsman apparently isn't much into print media. He claims neither to read nor admire critics. "And mostly I don't do interviews," he said early on what would be a late night. Though cordial, during the film's early promo-push, Lucas saw only three publications: the *Times*—L.A. and N.Y.—and *Time*. And possibly the last only because *Star Wars* publicists smelled a cover.

In person, he's no self-promoter: Robert Altman in reverse. His horn at least doesn't blow at midnight. "I never bank on anything. I think this movie will break even."

And then some. Box-office records in the first release week were set in 43—out of 43—theaters, according to Fox VP Ashley Boone. The seven-day gross: \$2.89 million. By June 1, company stock rose from 11½, the previous week's high, to 18.

Hourly figures were phoned in from Manhattan. In San Francisco, box lunches were sold to queued crowds. In Westwood, a section of Wilshire was littered with falafel wrappers—and lined with ticket holders. The all-time Hollywood Boulevard record set by *The Godfather* was broken. And George Lucas was in Hawaii. "The ball is back in the studio's court," said the bearded, slightly built filmmaker about his six-year project. (The movie is only Lucas' third feature: *American Graffiti* followed *THX-1138*.) "I've given this my best shot. We're off to the sun."

LUKE SKYWALKER, the Lucas-like hero in *Star Wars*, left more than his uncle's moisture farm on the arid planet of Tatooine. He's also headed

for America's merchandise marts. "In a way, this film was designed around toys," Lucas said, lighting up at the subject. He may look like a brooding scientist, but the man is boyish on one subject at least. "I actually make toys. I'm not making much for directing this movie. If I make money, it will be from the toys."

Etcetera. Upcoming are Marvel comic books, inflatable laser swords, miniature ape-like Wookiees, T-shirts, a gilded C-3PO (the movie's homage to the Tin Man), computer games, posters, a mock-up Imperial Death Star spaceship, and Obi-Wan, perhaps the first-ever senior-citizen doll. The goodies are due at counters this summer. "I

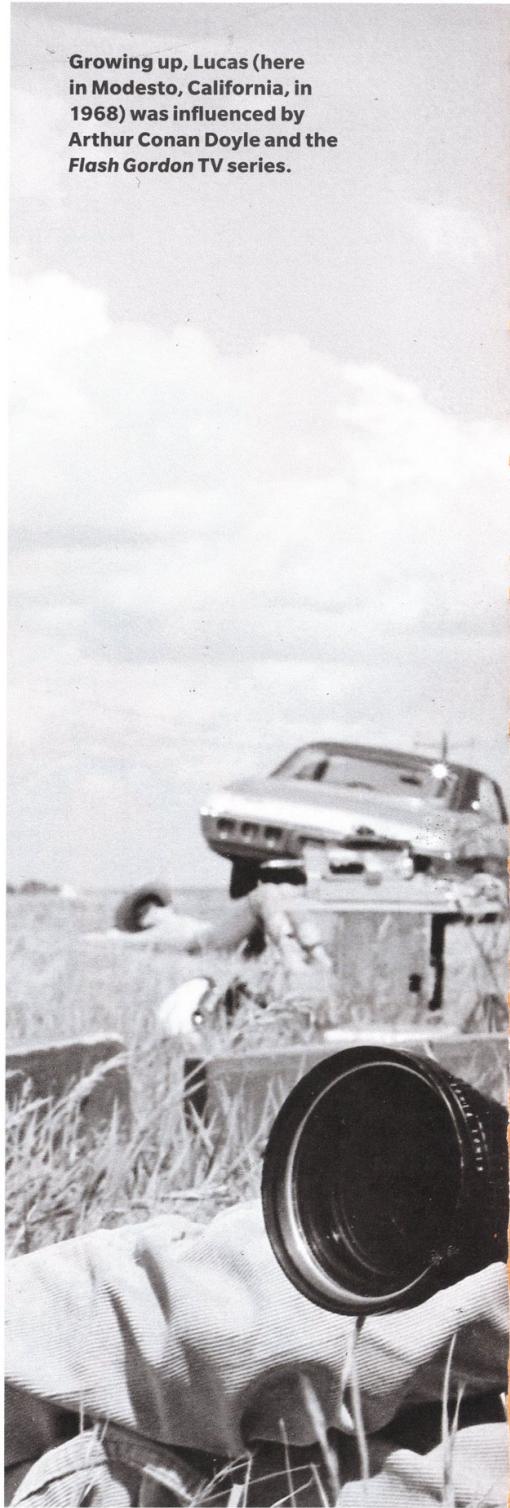
"In a way, this film was designed around toys. I actually make toys. I'm not making much for directing this movie. If I make money, it will be from the toys."

don't consider it cashing in, but I have invested in a toy company operation. Also, we'll be involved with the largest toy company in the world. This could be very large.

"I think of this as a movie Disney would have made when Walt Disney was alive." Chatting while watching rushes, Lucas felt the need to explain his project. "I call it 'space opera.' That's a genre that's been around a long time, in the books of Burroughs and Heinlein, but never really done on film.... What I attempted was science fiction without the science. I wanted an engaging Saturday matinee movie, but not camp or parody. And not a heavy intellectual trip like *2001*. Think of this as *The Sting* in outer space."

Lucas had been urged after *Graffiti*

Growing up, Lucas (here in Modesto, California, in 1968) was influenced by Arthur Conan Doyle and the *Flash Gordon* TV series.



to tackle something deep. Instead, he went for what he wanted: pure entertainment. "THX was my 20-year-old consciousness; I used my head as a filmmaker. *Graffiti* was me at 16 using my heart. This movie was using my hands, at 12.... I wanted a contemporary version of the myth and the fairy tale. Storytelling has always been about the faraway. The Victorian era had the



exotic East. In early America, there was the lure of the West. It was savage. Until about 20 years ago, we believed we could go to Treasure Island.

"There's a whole generation today with a great need for fantasy. *The Lone Ranger* and *Long John Silver*. *Star Wars* is hopefully a feeble attempt to make up for that lack, without goriness or violence.

"It's a hard genre to pull off. Enchanted forests are over-the-hill. Also, I wanted to show the importance of friendship. Two males who don't hate each other, who don't go off blowing up stadiums."

A Super Bowl heist would surely have been easier than the Lucas undertaking. "I was very broke after *Graffiti*," the director said when asked

about the genesis of *Star Wars*. "I'd spent four and a half years trying to get *Apocalypse Now* off the ground. At that time, nobody would do that movie, and nobody wanted to do this movie." A 12-page outline of *Star Wars* was turned down by both United Artists and Universal.

"Finally, Fox offered a little development money, very little," Lucas said.

While working on the 1968 film *Finian's Rainbow*, Lucas became friends with the director, Coppola. Here, they collaborated on Lucas' feature-film debut, 1971's *THX-1138*. Opposite: Lucas directed young Ron Howard in 1973's *American Graffiti*.



"Our original budget was \$18 million, which we scaled down to \$14 million. Then we got it down to a bare \$8.5 million. The studio said \$7.5, and we said, 'We'll do it.' Gary Kurtz [Lucas' producing partner] and I figured somehow we'd get the extra money."

As budgets go, this one went eventually to \$9.5 million—a bargain among this summer's releases. "We're the rock-bottom," claimed Lucas. "The *Deep* is \$14 million. *A Bridge Too Far* is \$22 million. And Francis [Coppola], who finally did *Apocalypse Now* [of which Lucas is part owner], will come in at \$25 million."

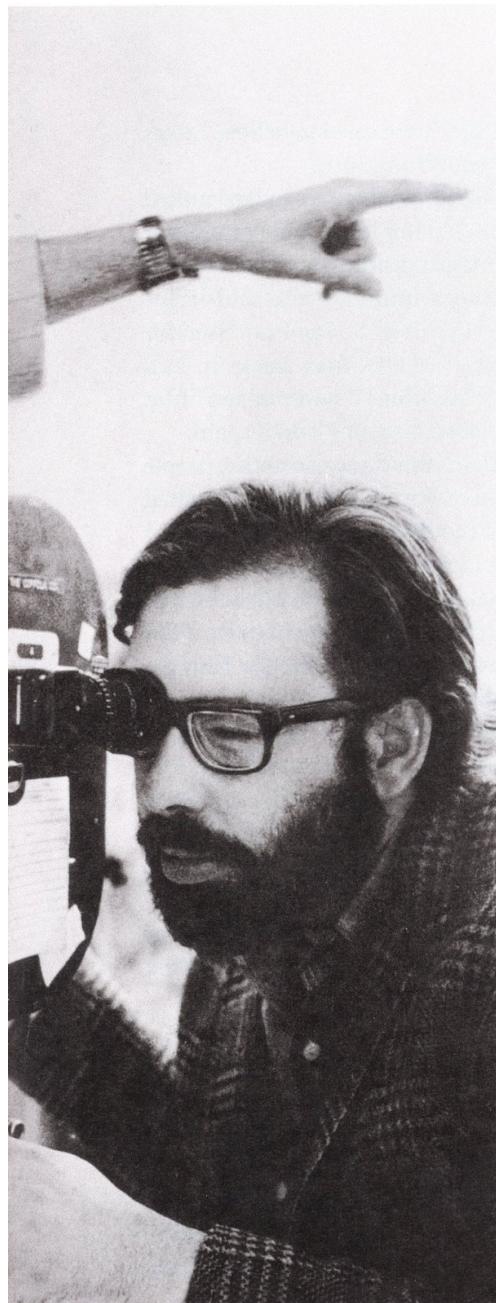
LAST WEEK, Fox president Alan Ladd Jr., overseer of *Star Wars*, recalled his struggles in getting the studio go-ahead: "How do you do a synopsis of this movie for a board of directors? Imagine saying, 'There is a Wookiee named Chewbacca, and...' The company was going through a bad period anyway. [Fox Chairman] Dennis Stanfill decided to go with it, and then fortunately didn't ask a lot of questions.

"For four years George and I have been talking—though he and I together don't make one-half an extrovert—and only a week before release did I see the film. The humanity is what makes it.

All I can say is that the man got a performance out of a robot."

Somehow. "There is no magic in moviemaking," said the director who masterminded 363 special effects. He's admittedly now weary. "What's there has to be there." Unlike many of the film generation among whom he is the current wunderkind, Lucas isn't overzealous about moviemaking. "I see the whole process as war: money and energy and hurt feelings. Say some poor clown has to fall out of a 10-story building. What if he dies?"

Summed up ace editor and Universal vice president Verna



Fields, "George is a sufferer."

"I consider this my professional movie debut," Lucas said, without pomp. *Star Wars* took 18 months of shooting in Tunisia, England, Guatemala and Death Valley, among other locations. "What it means is you have to act like a corporation president. In the old days, if the horses weren't there, you'd call Jack Warner and yell, 'Why the hell aren't the horses here?' Now you do your own yelling and hiring and firing. I had to build my own studio, render the storyboards, devise the optics. And I poured a lot of my own money in."

"I don't like always to be angry, and on this I was a lot. The crew did not always do things as well as I would have liked. You go around disgusted and give up being a free person—that's what directing a major movie is like."

Steven Spielberg, Lucas' friend and director of *Jaws*, remarked recently, "Oh, he complains. But look at the results. George ran down *Graffiti* too. Before I'd seen it, he said, 'Forgive me. This is my tribute to Sam Katzman [B-picture producer, things like *Get Yourself a College Girl*].' I went in expecting a turkey. But every one of George's films is incredibly enjoyable—and personal."

IF MOVIE-MAKING IS the work of a single person, as Orson Welles claimed, how does the singular Lucas see the finished product? "You'd better like your own movies. You have to look at every frame 300 to 400 times. You can really suffer. Fortunately, I haven't made anything yet I couldn't sit through. But, no, you never deliver your vision."

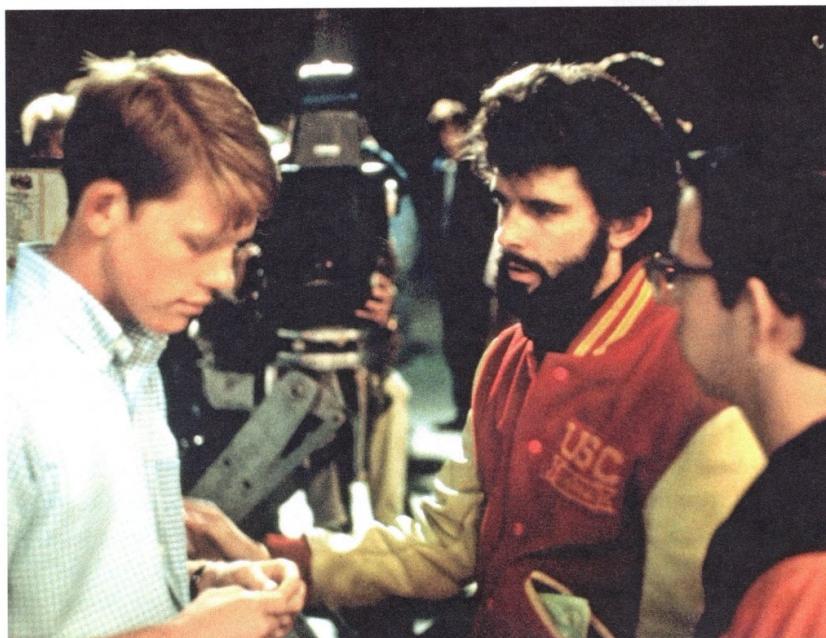
"Francis says on *Apocalypse* that he at last has learned to do the Big Movie. He says he now sees how it can go all the way through to the other side. Before, he always suffered and went crazy. Like we all do."

Painter (his oils are reminiscent of

Keane, yet original), furniture builder, owner of a sci-fi shop in New York, Lucas is as adept with cars as with cameras. "I don't know if even he knows where his talent comes from," Fields said. Others, lately, think that they know. In a rush to fill in blanks, rumorists offer Welles-like misconceptions. For example, they say the Lucas family live in "a modest San Anselmo cottage." Wrong. They live in a black-shingled house minutes from the Golden Gate Bridge. It is actually a mini studio, complete with editing and screening rooms—and a 78-rpm jukebox.

Lucas claims he never was a movie buff. "As a kid [in Modesto, California, the setting of *Graffiti*], I only went to movies to chase girls. I was totally into cars. Anyway, it took years before good movies got to my town. And foreign films—never."

"I wanted to go to art school, but my father would only send me to a real university." Cinematographer Haskell Wexler, for whom Lucas built a race car, steered him to USC. "I was interested in photography, so the only thing to major in was cinema," Lucas remembered. "Suddenly I was turned on to this whole amazing new world. Everybody there wanted to direct. But I learned editing and camera work."





Top: *Star Wars* cast members Mark Hamill, Carrie Fisher and Harrison Ford in 1977. Above: Lucas with a model for the second Death Star in *Return of the Jedi*. Opposite: A promotional poster for the film that would make Lucas a household name.

Soon he was making movies for the U.S. Information Agency. Among the film students hired there by Verna Fields were Lucas and his future wife. "George was almost fired," Fields recalled. "He kept falling asleep at the Moviola. Then we realized he was working on *THX* at night. We all thought he was terribly slow. But, yes, the talent was recognized very early."

LUCAS BEGAN his association with Coppola on the ill-fated *The Rain People*. With some backing from Warner Bros., the teaming led to the San Francisco-based American Zoetrope, an ambitious film factory. When both *THX*

and *Rain People* flopped at Warners, the backing came undone. The friendship remained. Later, Coppola used his bankability to help get *Graffiti* made.

"The way I make movies I learned from Francis," Lucas said. "I was his right hand for 10 years. I absorbed his idiosyncrasies. Yet we're exact opposites, 180 degrees apart; as a result, we're each other's foil. You need that in this business."

Still headquartered at Zoetrope, the men are part of a tribe of Marin County filmmakers that includes John Korty, Philip Kaufman and Michael Ritchie. Though there are other hints, a line in *Star Wars* lingers: "Sand People ride

single file." One is led to believe Lucas is a loner. Wrong again.

These filmmakers are indeed united artists, sharing ideas and sometimes percentage points. Cronyism? "That's always been around," Lucas said defensively. "I've lived in San Francisco for 10 years. I've spent six weeks in L.A. mixing this film. I'd never mixed a film here before. I doubt I'll do it again."

"There's this thing of wanting people to fail here. I'm not into all that. I wanted to see if I could do an epic adventure, and I did it. I found directing—as opposed to filmmaking—50 percent business and 50 percent being a psychiatrist. That doesn't leave much time for film. So I'm retiring from this world."

"The system here requires large budgets. I'm cheap about films. I've always tried to make them for as little as possible. I hate to waste money; I don't spend it lightly," said the man who was made a millionaire by *Graffiti*.

That film was the 11th largest grosser ever. *Star Wars* should put Lucas in the top 10.

"WHAT DO I want to do? Underground films. I want to help my friends. And I'll executive produce to make a living." Lucas seems to mean it. "If there's a recurrent theme in my work, it's about taking responsibility. We really make our own cages. I call it 'simplistic positivism.' But the point is, it's me."

He claims he won't direct the *Star Wars* sequels himself. "There should be at least three or four, but I won't direct them. I made the prototype. I'll not do that again. Let others interpret it their own way.... I really want to go back to film school. I started out working with my hands, making cabinets, making films. I want to get back to that. Filmmaking is an art, like any other, no greater or less. But it's a crazy art. Or maybe I'll get my master's in anthropology. That's what movies are about, anyway. Cultural imprints. Visual explorations. There are ways of evoking images that haven't been done yet. I want to make films I don't have to finish." ●



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PETER CUSHING
and
ALEC GUINNESS

Written and Directed by
GEORGE LUCAS

Produced by
GARY KURTZ Music by
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THE LOOK

Creating the Canvas

Conceptual artist Ralph McQuarrie translated George Lucas' ideas into the visual template for an iconic franchise.

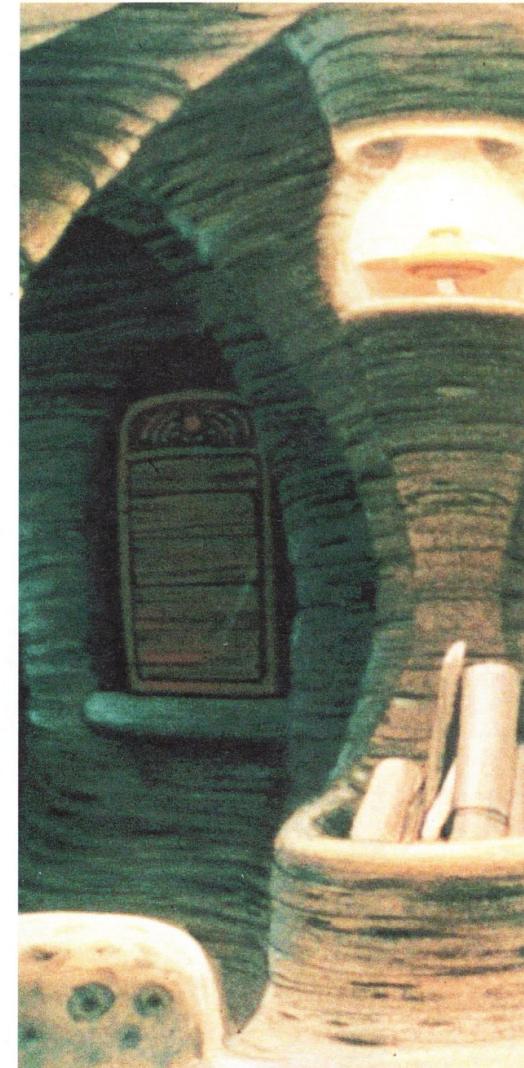
BY DENNIS MCLELLAN

WHEN DIRECTOR George Lucas hired illustrator Ralph McQuarrie in 1974, to create a series of paintings visualizing scenes from his script for an intergalactic war movie he was trying to sell, McQuarrie liked the concept for the space fantasy. He just didn't think it would ever get made. "My impression was, it was too expensive. There wouldn't be enough of an audience. It's just too complicated," he recalled in a 1999 interview with the *San Diego Union-Tribune*. "But George knew a lot of things that I didn't know."

McQuarrie's dynamic artwork helped persuade 20th Century Fox to greenlight what became the 1977 blockbuster *Star Wars*, and it helped Lucas explain his vision. "When words could not convey my ideas, I could always point to one of Ralph's fabulous illustrations and say, 'Do it like this,'" the director said when McQuarrie

died in 2012 at age 82. "His genial contribution, in the form of unequalled production paintings, propelled and inspired all of the cast and crew of the original *Star Wars* trilogy."

McQuarrie, a one-time technical artist for Boeing, created the look of Darth Vader, C-3PO, R2-D2, the stormtroopers, and many other characters. His production paintings were also used as models for the design of many of the film's locales, such as the desert planet of Tatooine and the Death Star. In a 2011 interview with the Australian newspaper the *Daily Telegraph*, McQuarrie said his work on *Star Wars* was "a special opportunity to start from the ground up. Being able to create new characters, vehicles and different worlds... and since when I started it wasn't even clear that the film would be made, I didn't have to limit myself."



He and Lucas would meet every few weeks, McQuarrie recalled in that interview, and "he would explain what he was looking for and leave me to my work. Next visit, we would go over my drawings and discuss any changes. We had a very good working relationship."

As for the iconic look of Darth Vader, McQuarrie said, "George had described Vader as having flowing black robes. In the script, Vader had to jump from one ship to another, and in order to survive the vacuum of space, I felt he needed some sort of breathing mask. George said 'OK,' suggested adding a samurai helmet, and Darth Vader was born. Simple as that."

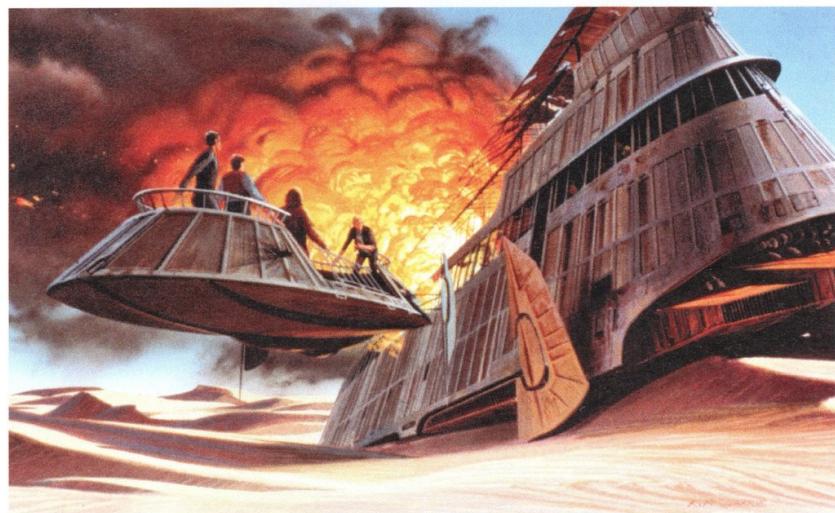
One of the characters McQuarrie was most fond of was R2-D2. "He has a lot of personality for a small metal robot," the artist said. "The film version isn't quite as squat as my original concept, but for the most part,



it reflects my design."

McQuarrie went on to work as a conceptual designer and a matte painter on both *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*. He also did spaceship design work on Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* and shared an Academy Award for best visual effects for *Cocoon*. Among his other credits are *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home* and the *Battlestar Galactica* TV series.

"One thing that stands out about Ralph's artwork is a sense of scale—he would often juxtapose a tiny figure in a painting to demonstrate the grand scale of the environment the character was in," said John Scoleri, who collaborated with McQuarrie and Stan Stice on the 2007 book *The Art of Ralph McQuarrie*. "The other thing about Ralph's work is when he did



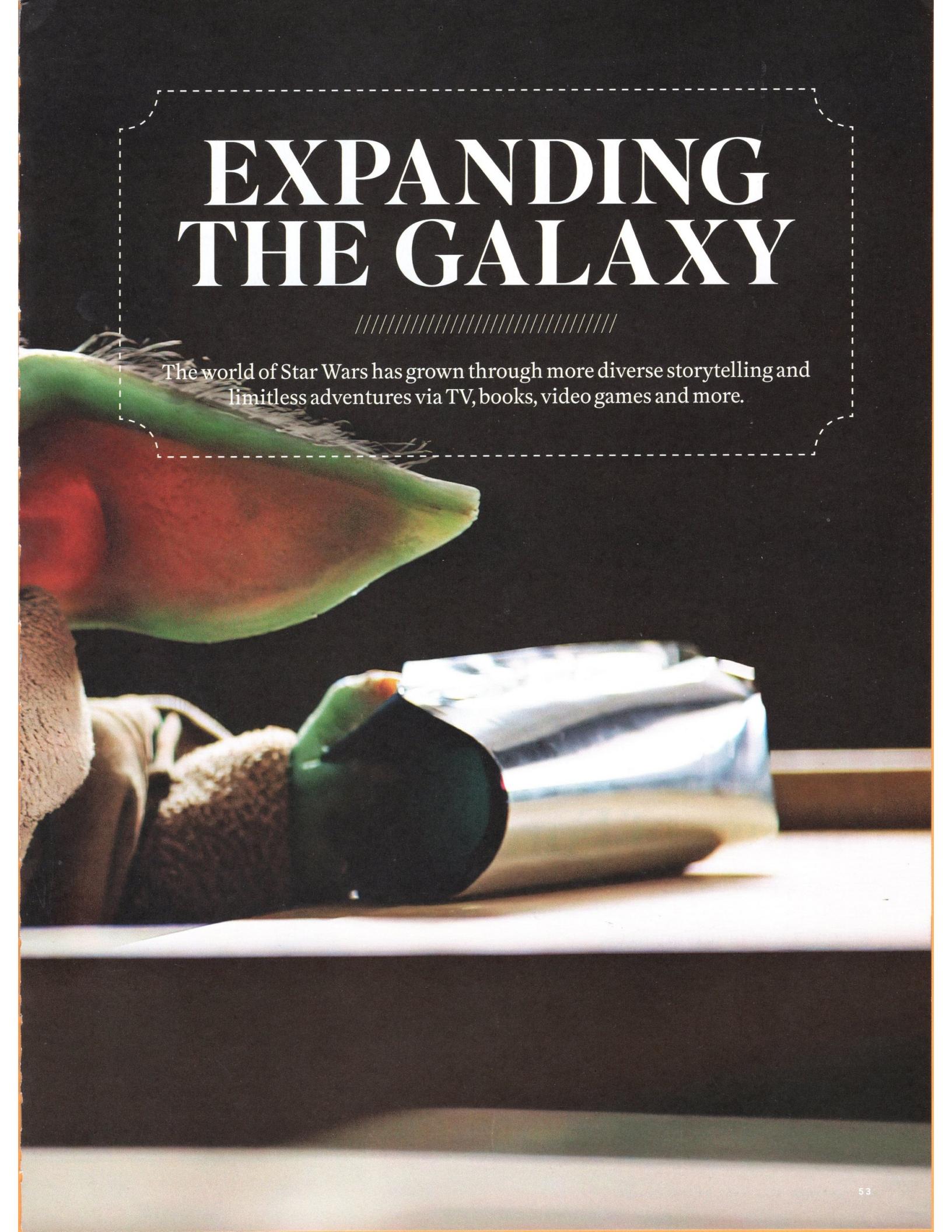
the paintings for *Star Wars*, he never imagined that those would be seen beyond the people making the movie. And yet [decades] later, those paintings are used as posters and lunchboxes and toys and have a life that he never would have dreamed." ●

McQuarrie's stunning artwork shows the early ideas for characters like Yoda (top, in *The Empire Strikes Back*) and the explosive confrontation on Jabba the Hutt's barge (above, in *Return of the Jedi*).



Baby Yoda (aka *The Mandalorian's* Grogu) has quickly become one of the most popular Star Wars characters despite never having appeared in a movie.

EXPANDING THE GALAXY



The world of Star Wars has grown through more diverse storytelling and limitless adventures via TV, books, video games and more.

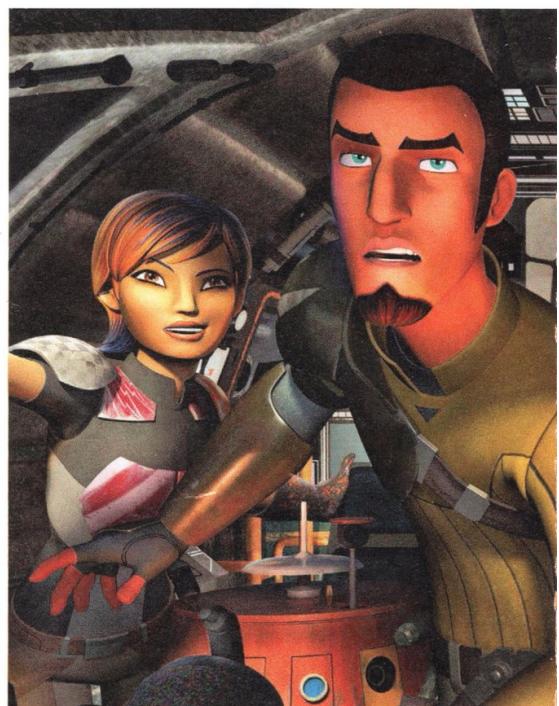


TELEVISION

Shows of Force

These TV series have filled in the gaps of the movie lore while introducing a new wave of adventures.

BY RICH SANDS





STAR WARS: THE CLONE WARS

The Emmy-winning computer-animated series spanned 133 episodes over 12 years after launching with a feature film in the summer of 2008. The show introduced Anakin Skywalker's popular Padawan, Ahsoka Tano (above right), a character who made the jump to live action and will soon have her own Disney+ series.



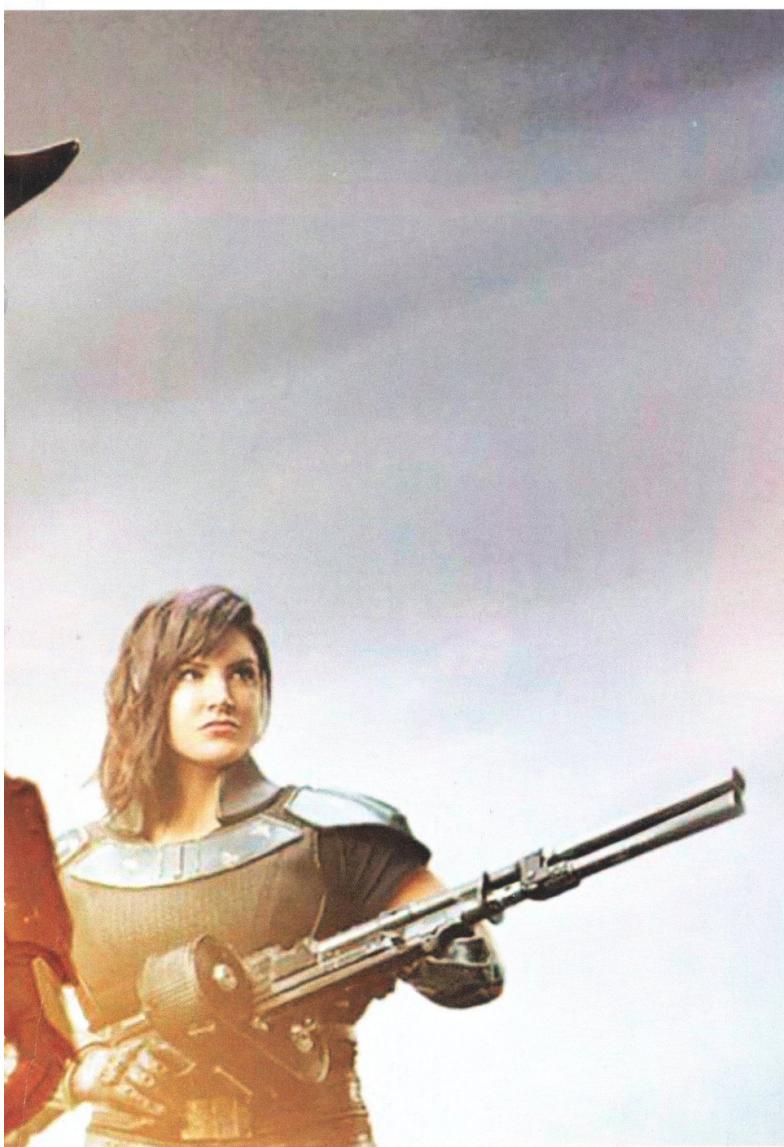
STAR WARS REBELS

Set in the years leading up to *A New Hope*, this show centered on a group of heroes who worked to undermine the Empire in the Outer Rim. James Earl Jones (Darth Vader) and Frank Oz (Yoda) guest-starred as their iconic film characters.

STAR WARS RESISTANCE

Another show featuring a ragtag group of rebels (including BB-8, on loan from Poe Dameron), *Resistance* takes place as the First Order is gaining power, alongside the events of *The Force Awakens*.



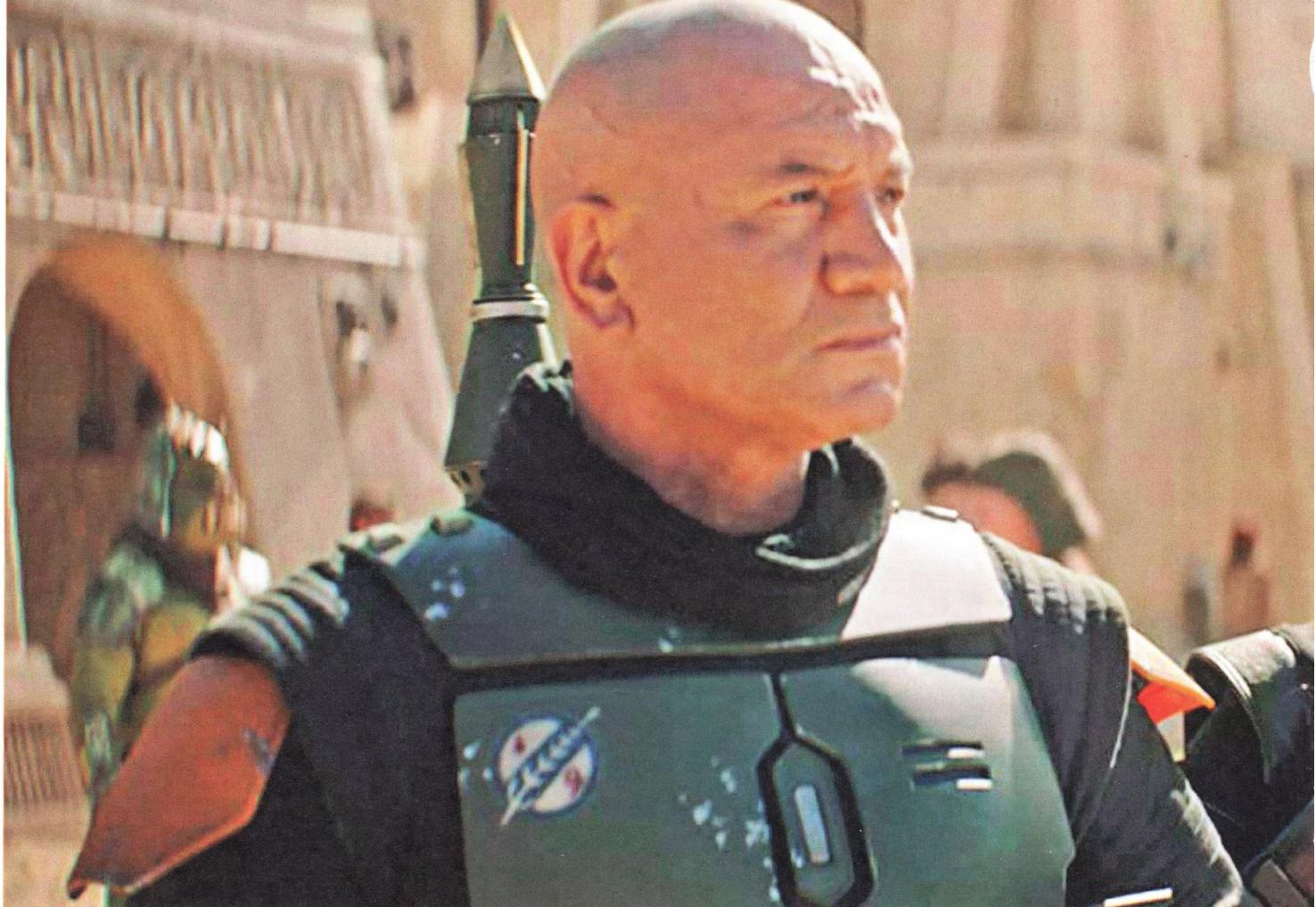


THE BAD BATCH

The Bad Batch, officially known as Clone Force 99, are a rugged group of clone troopers who were engineered with special abilities. Dee Bradley Baker provides the voices for each member of the unit, which was first introduced in *The Clone Wars*. The second season premieres on Disney+ this year.

THE MANDALORIAN

Pedro Pascal stars as Din Djarin, a crafty bounty hunter who was adopted by the Children of the Watch, a devout sect of Mandalorian warriors. After a job goes awry, he commits himself to protecting the Child (aka Baby Yoda, whose real name is Grogu), a Force-sensitive survivor of the Empire's purge of the Jedi.



LEGO STAR WARS SPECIALS

Beloved characters like Yoda, C-3PO, R2-D2, Darth Vader and Rey get a comedic spin in these lighthearted, kid-friendly animated adventures. *The LEGO Star Wars Holiday Special* flashed back to a time when Obi-Wan Kenobi and Qui-Gon Jinn were bored out of their minds by the trade disputes that were central to the prequel films.



THE BOOK OF BOBA FETT

Book has opened a new chapter on the life of the fan-favorite bounty hunter (played by Temuera Morrison), who was presumably killed off in *Return of the Jedi*. Though sometimes treated like a secondary character in his own series, the gritty Fett eventually becomes crime lord of the city of Mos Espa on Tatooine, with help from his associate Fennec Shand (Ming-Na Wen).





"Seeing him on camera and seeing him in person, the way it activates your primal childhood dreams, we're all gonna be second fiddle to this little guy," *Mandalorian* star Pedro Pascal has said of his sidekick.

A vertical column on the left side of the page features a blurred, abstract background image. It consists of several large, out-of-focus circles in shades of orange, red, and blue, set against a dark, indistinct background. The circles overlap and create a sense of depth and motion.

THE PHENOMENON

A Child Star Is Born

Grogu, aka Baby Yoda, has become an adorable pop-culture sensation.

BY TRACY BROWN

AFTER BLASTING their way through the doors of a heavily guarded storage facility in a remote encampment, a pair of bounty hunters follow a tracking device to a small floating pod. The slightly weathered, egg-shaped carrier is unremarkable at first glance. But the reveal of its precious cargo during the final moments of the 2019 series premiere of *The Mandalorian*—the Star Wars franchise's first live-action television series—sent a shockwave unlike any other throughout the galaxy.

Bundled up within the pod is an adorable green alien child who immediately wins over the hearts of viewers. Unofficially dubbed Baby Yoda for his resemblance to the iconic wizened Jedi Master, the Child not only became the show'suzziest character but one of the biggest pop-cultural phenomena in recent years.

The continuing popularity of Baby Yoda—whose name is eventually revealed to be Grogu—shows how the delicate balancing act between nostalgia and innovation can still be a potent combination for

Star Wars, especially when combined with the strengths of television. From the furry, teddy bear-like Ewok warriors who bravely helped the Rebel Alliance in *Return of the Jedi* to the beakless porgs populating Luke Skywalker's remote sanctuary in *The Last Jedi*, Star Wars isn't afraid to lean into cute in its creature characters. Lovable droids R2-D2 and BB-8 further exemplify the breadth of the non-humanoid characters that have endeared audiences.

Still, Grogu—brought to life on screen through a combination of practical puppetry and CGI—is special. It's been clear since his introduction that the Disney+ show's cast and crew love Grogu just as much as its audience does. Werner Herzog, who played the client trying to procure the Child, has described him as "heartbreakingly beautiful."

With his large eyes and ears, Grogu's visual appeal is obvious, even for non-Star Wars fans. But this charm is enhanced because his protector, the Mandalorian Din Djarin, wears a helmet that cov-



ers his face in almost every scene. Opposite the mysteriously cool Mando, Grogu's expressiveness and diminutive stature make him the character viewers can't help but become attached to. Grogu's most adorable moments—from sipping soup and sneaking eggs to pushing buttons he shouldn't—are bite-size and perfectly shareable as GIFs and memes. It wasn't long before people who are not interested in Star Wars nevertheless became intrigued by the sweet little character.

For any Star Wars fans who happen to somehow be immune to Grogu's inherent charms, his resemblance to Yoda still makes him an intriguing character. Plenty about the history and the inhabitants of the franchise's faraway galaxy remains a mystery even after 45 years, including details about Yoda's unnamed species.

Perhaps the most surprising decision around the launch of *The Mandalorian* was Lucasfilm's choice—at the request of showrunner Jon



Grogu's appeal is so broad that in 2021 there was a Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade balloon (top) based on the bobblehead figurine made by Funko (left). Above: Kyle Mooney plays an irreverent version of the little green guy on SNL's "Weekend Update."

BREAKOUT CHARACTERS

Favreau—to delay the timeline on creating merchandise based on the Child so his introduction could be kept a secret. While this meant there were no Grogu products immediately available when the show premiered, the audience did experience his introduction as the producers intended.

This is a bit of a departure for a franchise that includes characters like Boba Fett, whose introduction was teased by toys that could help build anticipation for the movies. The delay may have helped prolong the initial fervor around Grogu—nothing stokes demand more than scarcity. Plus, fans discussing theories about Grogu's identity and past online, those making their own Grogu toys to fill the void, and even those sharing viral memes on social media were all taking part in a participatory element of modern fandom that contributed to the pop-cultural dominance of “the kid,” as Djarin endearingly calls him. And there has been no shortage of official Grogu-related items since: dolls, clothing, jewelry, a Chia Pet, a breakfast cereal, and even *Mandalorian* editions of board games like Monopoly and Operation.

Another key strategic decision was the show's release schedule. Unlike other streaming services that tend to drop full seasons of a show on one day to allow binge viewing, Disney+ releases episodes of its originals weekly. This not only gives Disney+'s buzziest show a chance to build its viewership by word of mouth, but it draws out the time viewers have to engage in conversations about a show as it unfolds. This serialized aspect of TV storytelling is particularly suited for building and sustaining fans in a way that films, even when part of a franchise, can't always replicate.

The magic of Grogu's popularity may be impossible to duplicate, but it makes a strong case that Star Wars' future might be in television. ●

More Fan Favorites

Grogu isn't the only beloved figure to originate outside the movies. Here are a few other popular protagonists.

BY RICH SANDS



Hera Syndulla (seen here in *Rebels*) piloted the starship Ghost, which keen-eyed observers spotted in *Rogue One*.

HERA SYNDULLA

A savvy tactician and brilliant pilot, Syndulla was the leader of the Spectres, a small group of revolutionaries in the animated TV series *Star Wars Rebels*, set in the years just before *A New Hope*. Her fans were thrilled to learn she was still active—and had received a promotion—in *Rogue One*, in which an intercom announcement is heard in the background summoning “General Syndulla” to the briefing room.

SAW GERRERA

Though he may be best known for his appearance in *Rogue One* (played by Forest Whitaker), the gruff extremist made his debut four years earlier on *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*. Fed up with what he saw as the Rebellion's passive tactics, he used ruthless techniques to fight the Empire.

DOCTOR APHRA

Chelli Lona Aphra was introduced in the pages of Marvel's *Darth*

Vader comic book in 2015 before starring in her own solo series. A morally ambiguous relic hunter with a sardonic sense of humor, she has no loyalty to either side in the Galactic conflict; her main motivation is the payday. “Archeology is just grave robbing with fancy paperwork,” she once said. “And I've got debts to pay.”

STARKILLER

A secret apprentice to Darth Vader, Starkiller (the alias of Galen Marek, the son of a Jedi) is the main character in the video game *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed*, hunting surviving Jedi knights. (The game allows players to decide if he chooses a path of good or evil; a new version for the Nintendo Switch was released in 2022.) Among his many memorable moments was a mission in which he single-handedly used the Force to pull a massive Star Destroyer out of the sky.

The New Architect

A devout disciple of George Lucas, prolific TV producer Dave Filoni has built his own storytelling legacy.

BY RICH SANDS

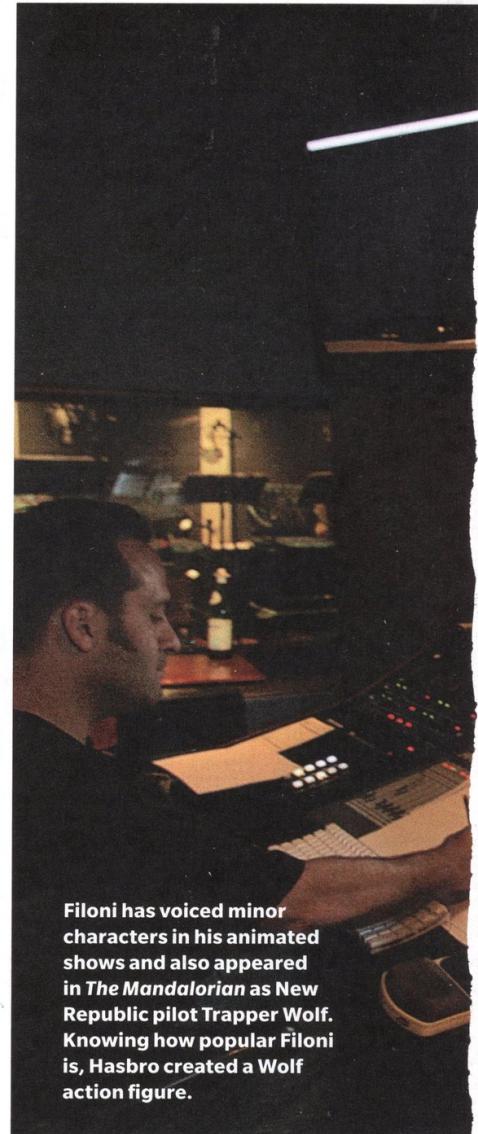
GEORGE LUCAS IS the ultimate Jedi master of the Star Wars universe, so it makes sense that he would have trained a Padawan learner to follow in his footsteps. That apprentice, Dave Filoni, worked side by side with Lucas on the first Star Wars animated TV series, and has since become one of the most prolific creative forces (pun intended) in the franchise. His name features prominently in the credits for *The Mandalorian* and *The Book of Boba Fett*, the two live-action Disney+ series that have won praise over the last three years for exploring new territory in the galactic timeline.

But those are just the most recent examples of Filoni's work. With more than 275 episodes (and counting) across six different shows (and counting), Filoni has had significant influence over Star Wars storytelling. In 2020, he was promoted to executive creative director of Lucasfilm, and he's seen as an indispensable resource to anyone working on Star Wars, including his fellow *Mandalorian/Boba Fett* executive producer Jon Favreau. "Even though I was actually writing the episodes, there were many, many hours of conversations, and I would show him things

I was writing, and he was giving me a tremendous amount of feedback and helping guide me through the world of Star Wars," Favreau told the Writers Guild of America West in 2021. "He had studied under George for I think a decade working on the animated shows, so I felt like I had a direct connection to the source code of this whole world with him."

Lucasfilm president Kathleen Kennedy has steered the Star Wars ship since Disney purchased the company in 2012, and she frequently leans on Filoni as an essential resource. "There isn't a thing that we do in the storytelling space that I don't check with Dave," Kennedy told *Vanity Fair* in 2019. "What I find about Dave is, you don't just sit down and have a discussion about plot or review characters inside the Star Wars world. You end up having meaningful, thoughtful discussions about what it is we're trying to say inside the storytelling. He has a lot of empathy."

Filoni, who was born three years before the first Star Wars film premiered, grew up in Mt. Lebanon, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Pittsburgh. His parents' artistic interests were a major influence on his own



Filoni has voiced minor characters in his animated shows and also appeared in *The Mandalorian* as New Republic pilot Trapper Wolf. Knowing how popular Filoni is, Hasbro created a Wolf action figure.

creative sensibilities. They exposed him at a young age to, among other things, the films of Akira Kurosawa and the music of Leonard Bernstein. He was also obsessed with the Saturday-morning cartoon version of the Dungeons & Dragons fantasy role-playing game, as well as classic Godzilla movies, the early Star Trek films and—of course—Star Wars.

He developed a love for animated storytelling and got his first significant job in the industry as a layout artist on the Fox show *King of the Hill*. A gig directing the Nickelodeon fantasy series *Avatar: The Last Airbender* put him on the radar of the Lucasfilm creative team in 2005, which was looking to finally bring Star Wars to television.



“I feel like my job is to bring George Lucas’ universe to the screen and make sure it lives up to the standards he’s set.”



Filoni has a deep love for Star Wars—he cosplayed as the Jedi master Plo Koon to see *Revenge of the Sith* and while attending Comic-Con International—and went into the interview with Lucas thinking it would be a fun story to tell friends rather than a legitimate chance at a new job. Alas, Lucas saw Filoni’s potential and hired him to help shepherd *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, first as a feature film and then into a series for Cartoon Network. “Just getting to meet George Lucas was pretty amazing, and then working with him and getting to be part of this process,” Filoni told *The Times* in 2008 when the movie was released. “It’s a great responsibility. I feel like my job is to bring his universe to the screen and make sure it lives up to

the standards he’s set.”

Lucas, who collaborated with Filoni up until Disney bought his company, appreciated that Filoni treated the job as an apprenticeship. “I immediately found him to be very open-minded and a great listener, which are qualities I admire, because it opens a person up to new experiences,” Lucas told *Vanity Fair*.

Filoni, who is rarely seen without his signature cowboy hat, embraced the opportunity to essentially get a degree in Star Wars. “George was able to take my willingness to learn and instruct me in all of the ways that he thought Star Wars should be done,” he told *The Star Wars Show* in 2016. “And I was soaking it up. Each time we did an episode, it was like an exam, and I

would show him what I learned.”

The Clone Wars developed into an Emmy-winning series and ran for six seasons on Cartoon Network and then Netflix before adding a final run of episodes on Disney+ in 2020. It explored the period of time when Anakin Skywalker was first flourishing as a Jedi before his decline to the dark side. Filoni created an eager Padawan for Anakin, a Togruta named Ahsoka Tano, who Anakin affectionately referred to as “Snips.” Amiable and fierce, Ahsoka (voiced by Ashley Eckstein) became a fan favorite.

Since she never appeared in any of the Star Wars films, viewers feared she might not have survived Order 66, the Emperor’s directive that wiped out the Jedi in *Revenge*

of the Sith. Instead, Ahsoka later showed up in Filoni's next animated series, Disney Channel's *Star Wars Rebels*, and, perhaps most surprisingly, in live-action form in *The Mandalorian* and *The Book of Boba Fett*, played by Rosario Dawson. The character will star in her own upcoming limited series on Disney+, adding to Filoni's already Death Star-size resume.

He followed up *Rebels* with *Star Wars Resistance*, a Disney Channel animated series that featured a group of Resistance spies working to thwart the First Order.

Filoni has been praised for creating new characters like Ahsoka, Mandalorian warrior Bo-Katan Kryze and Clone Force 99, the so-called "Bad Batch" of troopers he introduced in *The Clone Wars* (and who also have their own Disney+ animated series), but he has also won over fans with his ability to weave iconic characters into his shows with meaningful story beats rather than just fan-service cameos. At Lucas' suggestion, he brought back Darth Maul, the devilish-looking Sith lord who had been sliced in half with a lightsaber by

Obi-Wan Kenobi in *The Phantom Menace*. Maul's story of survival and revenge ultimately played out across both *The Clone Wars* and *Rebels*.

Filoni also brought Admiral Thrawn, who had existed only in books, into *Star Wars Rebels* and seamlessly incorporated legacy characters like Yoda, Obi-Wan Kenobi, Darth Vader, Princess Leia, Chewbacca, R2-D2 and C-3PO in *Clone Wars* and *Rebels*. "I get asked by fans about certain characters all the time," Filoni told *TV Guide Magazine* in 2015. "We've been pretty good at bringing them back, not just because people want them but because we have an important story to tell with them and how things cross over."

In a memorable arc of *The Clone Wars*, he fleshed out the backstory of a young Boba Fett, the beloved bounty hunter who was orphaned in the prequel films and became a feared villain in *The Empire Strikes Back*.

A decade later, Filoni and Favreau got a chance to explore the adult Fett after he escaped apparent death in *Return of the Jedi*. He became an unlikely ally of the Mandalorian, and then became a Tatooine crime boss in his own series, *The Book of Boba Fett* (see "Man of Mystery," at right). "Boba gives us a direct connection to the Star Wars saga, since he was involved in that story," Filoni told the *Hollywood Reporter* when the show premiered. "This creates a nice crossover point for both classic characters and new characters. Much of *The Mandalorian* was new or had not been seen on screen. Through Boba Fett, we can weave some of those characters and tales together using a character we know but don't know a lot about."

Beyond the Ahsoka series that's in production, there are constant rumors of other projects Filoni may be tackling in the years ahead, including movies. Though Lucas casts a long shadow, it's clear now that the apprentice has become a master in his own right. ●



Filoni, Lucas and a young admirer at a 2010 *Clone Wars* event in San Francisco.

BOBA FETT

Man of Mystery

Being a fan favorite has its advantages: Despite just four lines in *The Empire Strikes Back*, he ended up becoming one of the franchise's most popular characters.

BY TRACY BROWN

During the post-credits scene of *The Mandalorian* season 2 finale, famed bounty hunter Boba Fett walks into the headquarters of a criminal syndicate to kill a former associate and take over. The lingering shot as Fett takes his place on the throne makes the message abundantly clear: It's his time now.

The spinoff series *The Book of Boba Fett* follows Fett (Temuera Morrison) as he establishes himself as the new crime lord in charge among the local scum and villainy, along with his faithful right hand, Fennec Shand (Ming-Na Wen). The Disney+ series also fills in the gaps about what Fett has been up to since seemingly meeting his demise in 1983's *Return of the Jedi*.

Created more than 40 years ago, Fett is among the Star Wars franchise's best known and most popular characters, despite his limited presence in the original trilogy. Featured among a group of bounty hunters assembled by Darth Vader, Boba Fett made his live-action debut in 1980's *The Empire Strikes Back*, played by Jeremy Bulloch. According to the Disney+ documentary *Under the Helmet: The Legacy of Boba Fett*, he had just six minutes and 32 seconds of screen time and spoke a total of four lines.

Still, those few moments were memorable. A mys-

terious character clad in battle-worn armor who pilots a unique ship, Fett helps Vader track the heroes on the Millennium Falcon to Cloud City, where the crew is captured. And though he's a man of few words, it's clear Fett is unafraid of Vader or the Galactic Empire and is more concerned about collecting the bounty on Han Solo, whom he later delivers to the fearsome Jabba the Hutt.

Conceived by George Lucas as a new type of super trooper, Fett was designed by the film's art director (and future filmmaker) Joe Johnston and concept artist Ralph McQuarrie. Budgetary constraints led Lucas to reconceptualize the character as a lone bounty hunter.

Fett's first on-screen appearance actually came a couple of years before he was seen in *The Empire Strikes Back*, in an animated segment televised as part of the notorious *Star Wars Holiday Special* on November 17, 1978. The short sees a much chattier Fett befriending Luke Skywalker after saving him and his droids, only to be revealed as working for Darth Vader. (Toy company Kenner offered a special mail-in promotion for a Fett action figure in 1978 and 1979 with little explanation about who the character was, adding to the mystery.)

After *Empire*, the bounty



Fett (with Darth Vader and Lando Calrissian in his *Empire* debut, top) finally got the spotlight in *The Book of Boba Fett* (with deputy Fennec Shand, above).

hunter returned briefly in *Return of the Jedi*, where he was still part of Jabba's circle. When Luke came to Han's rescue, Fett was (accidentally) knocked into the giant mouth of a beast called a sarlacc in a sand pit and was assumed to have perished.

Although Fett's mystique was part of the character's original appeal, his official backstory was revealed in 2002's *Attack of the Clones*, which introduced Boba's father, Jango Fett (played by Morrison), a bounty hunter who was used as the template for the clone soldiers of the then-Republic's army. Boba was created in exchange for the donated genetic material, for Jango to raise as his own.

In *The Book of Boba Fett*, fans finally get answers as to how he survived his *Return of the Jedi* fate (blasting a hole in the sarlacc and crawling out through the sand) and what he's been up to: living with the Tusken Raiders, first as a prisoner, then as an ally, before meeting Shand and taking over as crime lord of the Tatooine town of Mos Espa.

As the season concluded in early 2022, Fett and his crew (including the Mandalorian) had dispatched the spice-running Pyke Syndicate and appeared to have brought peace to his community. How long that might remain the case is unknown, but Fett's history has been anything but predictable.

BEYOND THE MOVIES

The Never-Ending Stories

Novels, comic books and video games have helped satisfy the appetite of dedicated Star Wars fans.

BY GRAEME MCMILLAN

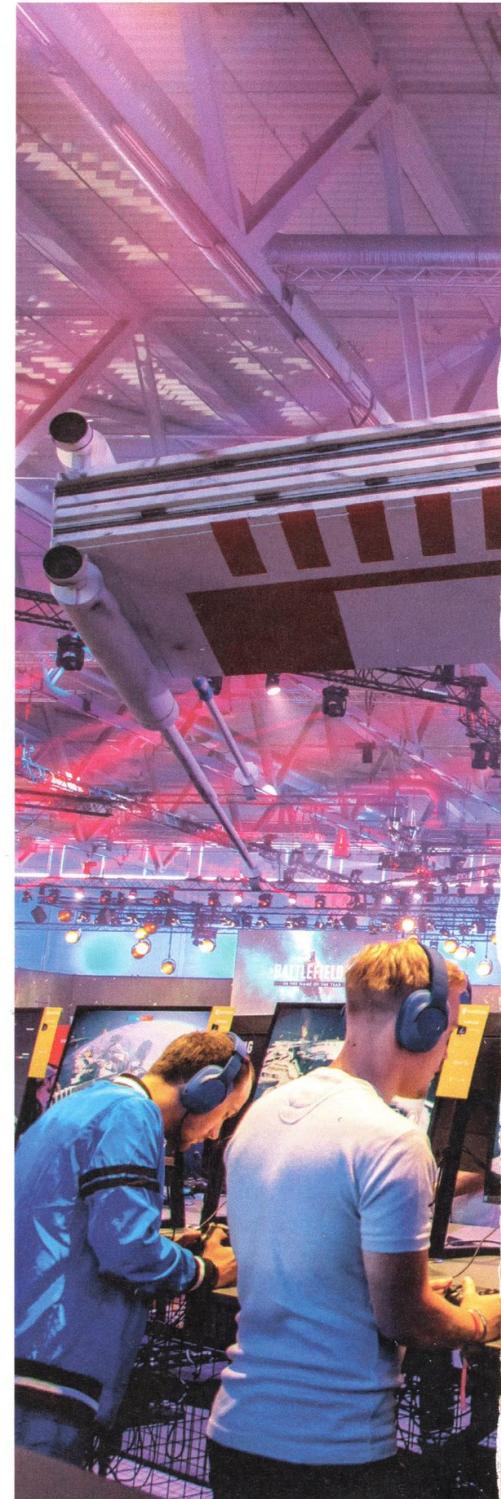
VIEWERS OF *THE Book of Boba Fett* were likely split into two camps when the Disney+ series introduced a particularly surly Wookiee in the show's second episode. For some, the reaction was doubtlessly along the lines of "He looks like a particularly grumpy Chewbacca—that's cool." For others, it was likely closer to a breathless level of excitement caused by recognizing Black Krrsantan.

What separates the two isn't a failure of memory when it comes to obscure background characters from the movies. Instead, it's a matter of whether or not the fans in question follow the entire Star Wars saga, wherever it appears—which means reading the many books and comics published on a monthly basis, as well as playing the video games, each of which makes the galaxy far, far away just a little bit bigger. To those taking the wider view, Black Krrsantan is well known as the overly violent furball for hire who stars in the pages of Marvel's *Doctor Aphra* comic.

The relationship between Star Wars canon and the publishing empire that has grown up around the franchise over the past five decades is, if anything,

longer and more complicated than it may appear. For one thing, there were both Star Wars prose and comics before the release of the very first movie back in 1977, thanks to efforts on behalf of 20th Century Fox to build an audience as quickly as possible to help what the studio feared had the potential to be a box office bomb. *Star Wars: From the Adventures of Luke Skywalker*—the official title of the novelization of the movie, credited to George Lucas but actually ghostwritten by Alan Dean Foster—hit bookstores in November 1976, six months before the movie came out. Marvel's *Star Wars* series launched in April 1977, just weeks before the film's opening.

Both were well received, and it wasn't too long before new adventures set after the end of the original movie were appearing on a regular basis. "At last! Beyond the movie! Beyond the galaxy!" declared the cover of Marvel's *Star Wars* No. 7, released in October 1977 and featuring the first licensed continuation of the saga. The series sold well for years before eventually being canceled in 1986, three years after *Return of the Jedi* brought the movie series to what certainly appeared at



the time to be a close.

Perhaps more interestingly, ghost-writer Foster followed up the movie's novelization with 1978's *Splinter of the Mind's Eye*, an original novel in which Luke and friends search for a mysterious crystal that gives its owner special powers. The project actually started life as potential source material for a cheap sequel to the



Fans tested out the video game *Star Wars: Battlefront II* at Gamescom in Cologne, Germany, in 2017.

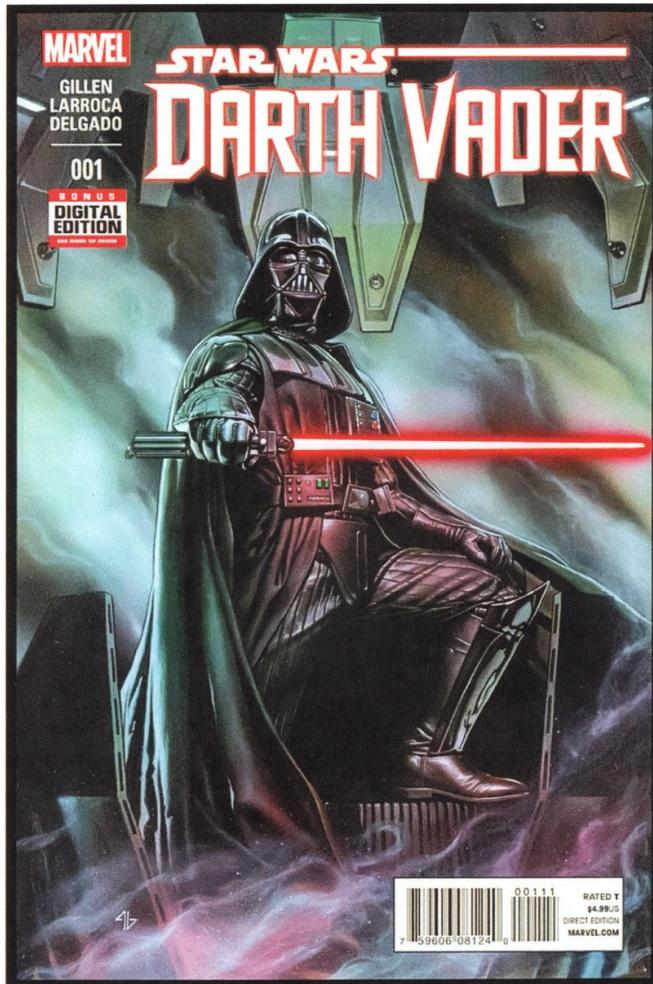
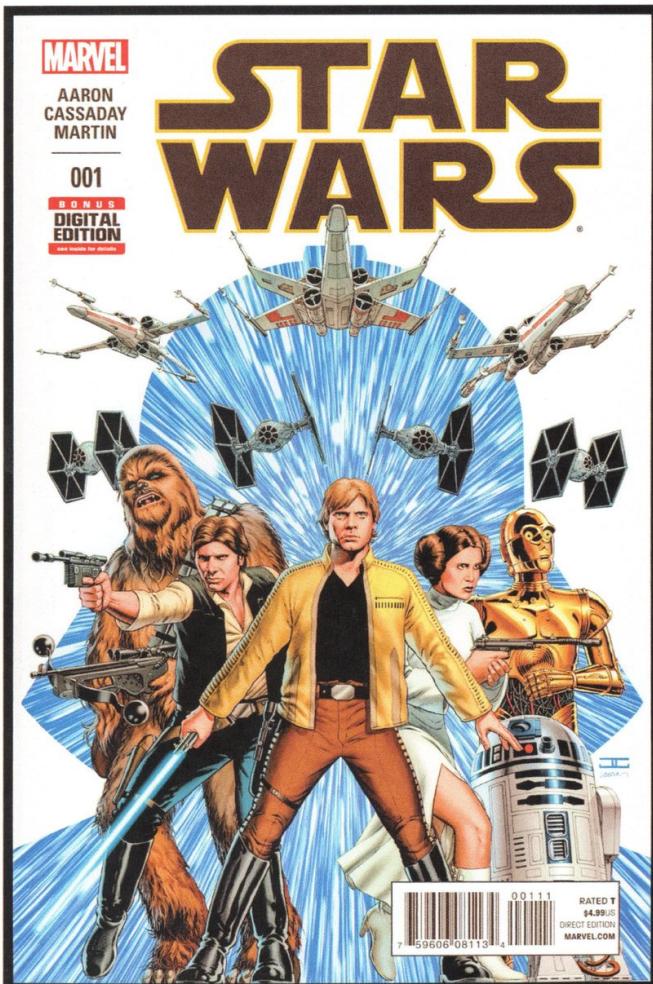
original movie, just in case it failed in theaters; consider it a glimpse at the road not traveled (thankfully). Del Rey would go on to publish another six original Star Wars novels before giving up the ghost in 1983.

Today, the period between the mid-1980s and very early '90s is referred to by Star Wars fans as "the dark ages"—a time when it seemed the franchise

was, for all intents and purposes, dead. That changed in 1991 with the release of Bantam Spectra's *Star Wars: Heir to the Empire* and Dark Horse Comics' *Star Wars: Dark Empire*, two original projects set in the aftermath of *Return of the Jedi*, which launched what would eventually become known as the "Expanded Universe" of Star Wars.

The EU, as fans refer to it, redefined

the idea of Star Wars to include stories stretching out to centuries before and after the movies themselves, building grand, elaborate histories of the Jedi, as well as creating countless relatives of the movie characters. All of this was coordinated by Lucasfilm, which kept tight control of how each story interacted with the larger continuity, to the delight of a growing



From left: The first issue of Marvel's 2015 Star Wars was the best-selling comic of the 2010s; Darth Vader has been another big hit for Marvel. Opposite: Video games and novels have also fleshed out the saga.

fan base. As a result, for a generation of fans, names like Mara Jade and Grand Admiral Thrawn hold as much power and importance as Luke Skywalker or Darth Vader.

Then, in 1996, came the most ambitious Star Wars licensing event to that point: *Shadows of the Empire* was an all-new story set during the original movie trilogy, told through novels, comic books, video games and toys. In addition to being a chance for Lucasfilm to flex its publishing muscles, it was also an opportunity for the company to promote what it had been doing with the franchise in video games after taking over the property in 1993. (Parker Brothers had published a handful of games in the 1980s; rudimentary in practical terms, they were essentially Star Wars in name only.)

In a 2002 interview with *Cinescape* magazine, George Lucas distanced himself from the tie-in material,

saying, "There's my world, which is the movies, and there's this other world that has been created, which I say is the parallel universe—the licensing world of the books, games and comic books. They don't intrude on my world, which is a select period of time, [but] they do intrude in between the movies. I don't get too involved in the parallel universe."

Sure, the movies might make oblique references to EU concepts. Aayla Secura, a background character in the prequel trilogy, got her start in comics, only for George Lucas to appreciate the design and bring her into the movies. Similarly, Coruscant, home planet of both the Galactic Republic and the Empire in the prequels, was originally created by author Timothy Zahn for the novel *Heir to the Empire*. But for the most part, the two existed in their own separate bubbles until the Walt Disney Company got involved.

Disney bought Lucasfilm in 2012, but it wasn't until 2014 that Lucasfilm announced it was essentially junking the entire EU (now known as Star Wars Legends) in favor of a new, unified canon. This era would commence in a novel fittingly titled *Star Wars: A New Dawn* and continue in multiple comic series published by Disney sibling Marvel, which would launch the following year.

Everything would be coordinated by the Story Group, a collection of Lucasfilm employees who served as both consultants and traffic cops for editors and creators telling Star Wars stories. "Story Group wants you to swing for the fences; they always do. But they want you to swing for a very particular fence, which is the fence that is somehow going to not knock down any other fences, which can be really challenging," was how writer Charles Soule (who has penned several *Star*

Wars comics, as well as the novel *Light of the Jedi*) described the group in a 2019 interview with StarWarsNewsNet.

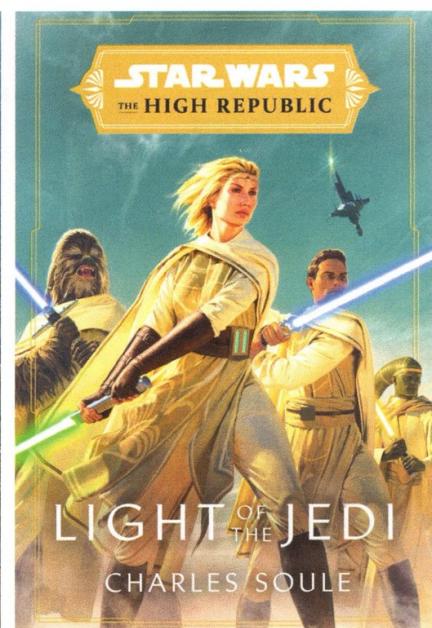
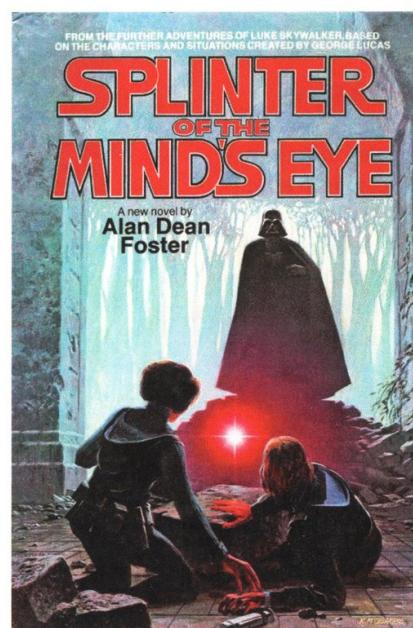
“This future of interconnected storytelling will allow fans to explore this galaxy in deeper ways than ever before,” Lucasfilm president Kathleen Kennedy said in a quote accompanying the 2014 announcement, producing much suspicion among fans.

Such skepticism faded in light of the results of the decision. Thanks to the traffic coordination of the Story Group, there was a new ease of travel for characters and storylines between media. New movies received entire publishing programs that offered important background information ahead of theater releases. Dangling plot threads finally found resolution, and fan-favorite background characters received their long-awaited spotlight in any number of releases. Fans of Oscar Isaac’s Poe Dameron had the chance to meet Poe’s parents during the era of the original trilogy in a number of comic projects, and the First Order’s enigmatic Captain Phasma was explored in eponymous comics and prose projects ahead of the 2017 release of *The Last Jedi*.

Wondering what happened to Qi’ra from *Solo: A Star Wars Story*? Read “War of the Bounty Hunters,” a storyline that ran through Marvel’s many *Star Wars* titles in 2021. Curious how the Resistance went from one ship of survivors at the end of *The Last Jedi* to the small army at the beginning of *The Rise of Skywalker*? The 2019 novel *Star Wars: Resistance Reborn* fills you in. Video games, despite their interactive nature, also became canonical; 2017’s *Star Wars: Battlefront II* introduced Iden Versio, an Imperial soldier who would be referenced in other games and novels for years.

Even Disney’s theme parks got in on the action: The Galaxy’s Edge attraction was explored in both the virtual reality game *Star Wars: Tales from the Galaxy’s Edge* and a Marvel comic miniseries set in the location.

Such was the success of this holistic approach that it stretched back into the



EU. Thrawn, the villain in 1991’s *Heir to the Empire*, was brought into canon for the animated TV series *Star Wars Rebels*, then given comic books and prose novels to reestablish him as a true threat. Meanwhile, characters created for what had traditionally been seen as secondary material started showing up elsewhere: Krrsantan teamed with Boba Fett on Disney+, and Doctor Aphra moved from comics to prose, with a potential Disney+ series a persistent rumor in recent years.

Just as publishing and video games kept Star Wars alive before the

prequel trilogy began in the 1990s, there’s a sense that publishing—be it video games, comics or books—has become central to defining the property today. It’s an idea underscored by the 2021 launch of *Star Wars: The High Republic*, a new line of comics and books set in the distant past of the franchise showing the Jedi at their prime for the first time canonically, ironically introducing something new to the saga. Forty-five years on, the tradition continues: The future of Star Wars will be found in the so-called tie-in material. ●

TV PARODIES

A Pop-Culture Force

Imitation has long been the sincerest (and funniest) form of flattery for Star Wars.

BY RICH SANDS

1. It's no surprise that the sci-fi-obsessed *Big Bang Theory* guys were Star Wars fans. One episode centered on their plans to see *The Force Awakens*. And in 2014's "The Proton Transmogrification," Sheldon is visited in his dreams by an Obi-Wan Kenobi-esque version of his childhood idol, TV host Professor Proton (Bob Newhart).

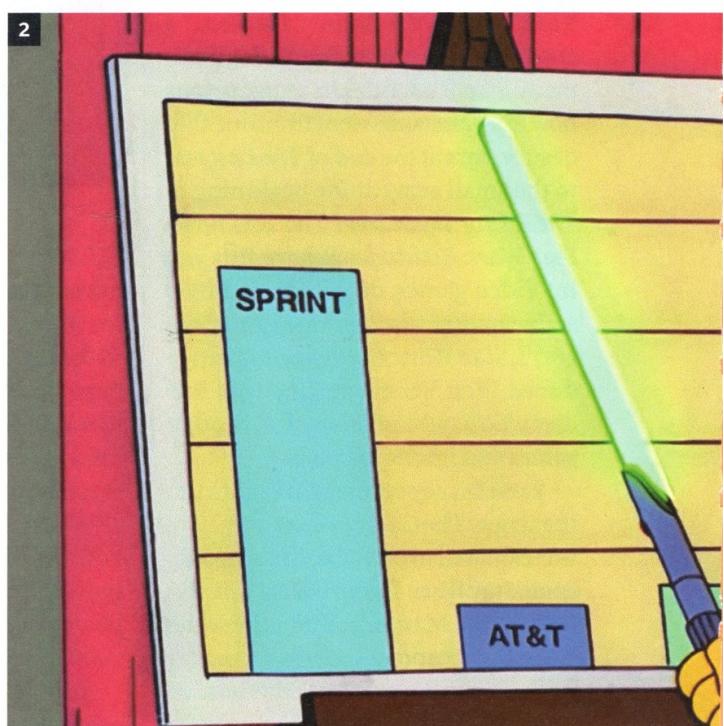
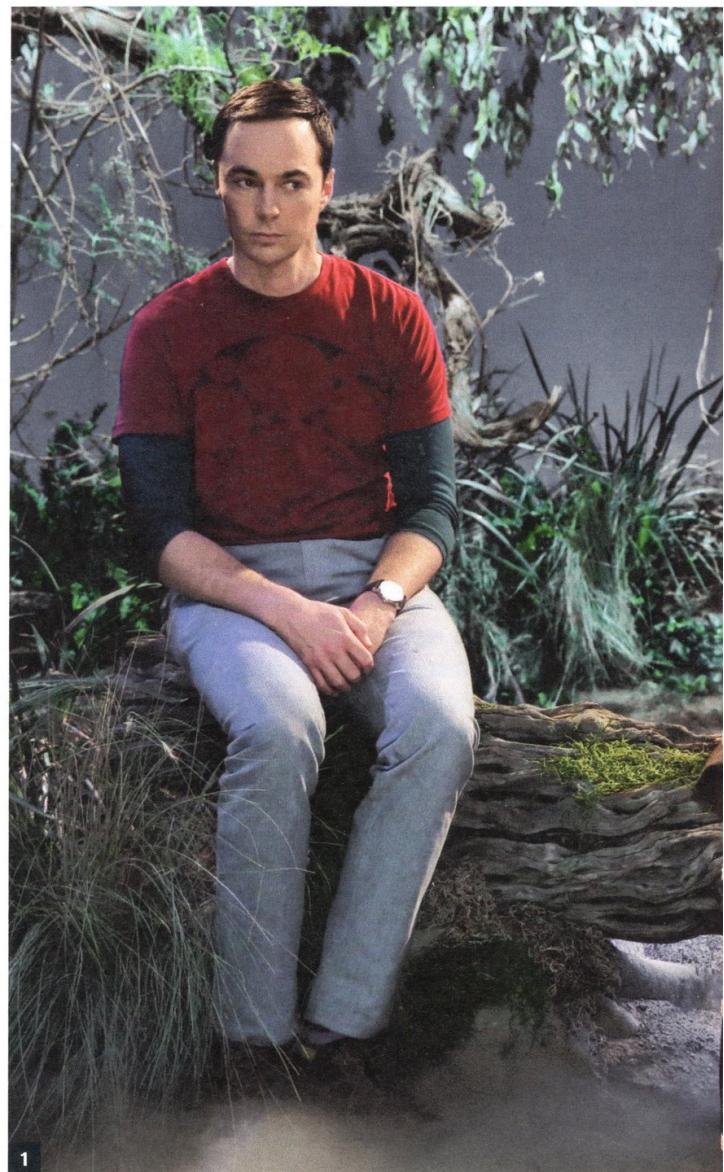
2. In "Mayored to the Mob," a 1998 episode of *The Simpsons*, Mark Hamill plays himself, starring in a dinner theater production of *Guys and Dolls* singing "Luke Be a Jedi Tonight" to the tune of "Luck Be a Lady Tonight."

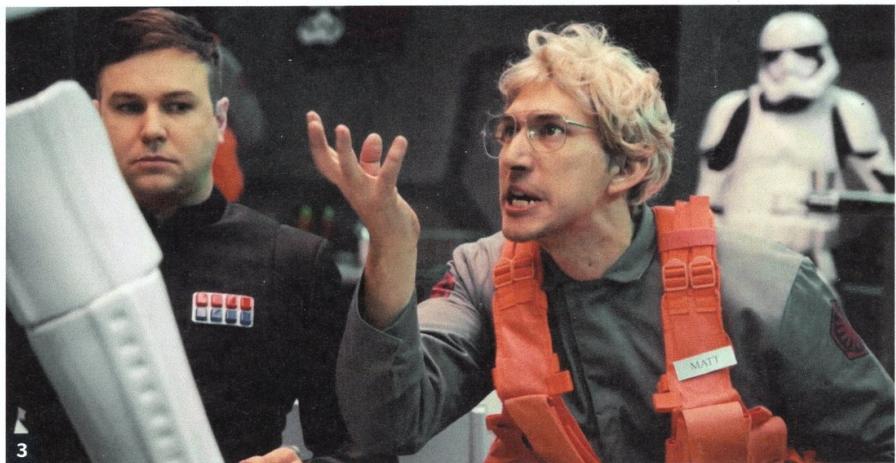
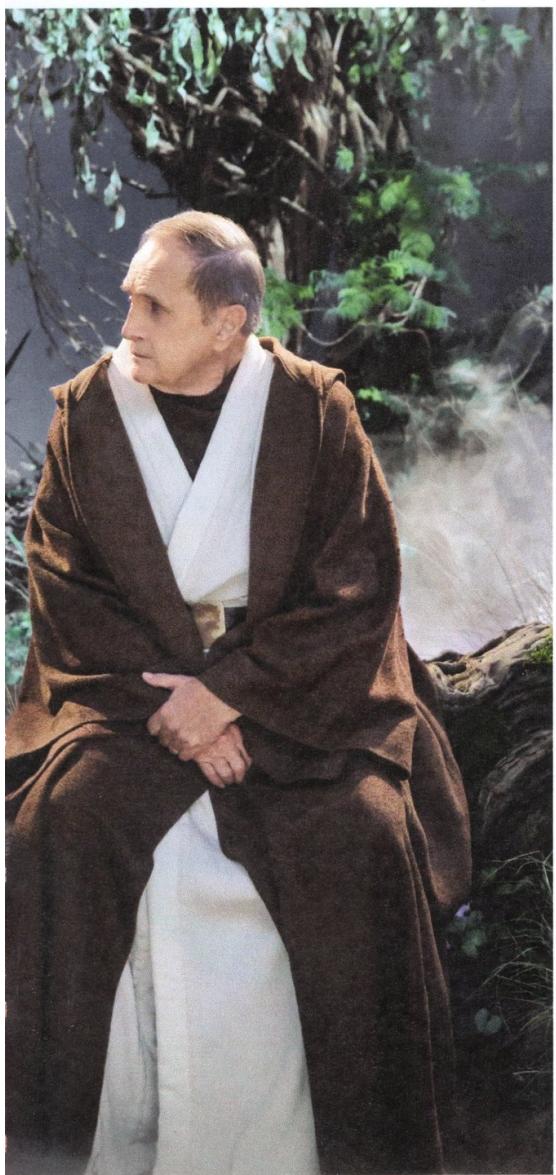
3. Adam Driver twice brought Kylo Ren to *Saturday Night Live* in hilarious *Undercover Boss* spoofs. First, in 2016, Ren (disguised as an awkward radar technician) learns how unpopular he is. In a 2020 follow-up, tightly wound Ren (this time incognito as an intern) is still lacking in social skills. "I made four new friends and only killed one of them," he says optimistically. "I'd say that's a pretty good start."

4. The stars of the Disney Channel cartoon *Phineas and Ferb* traveled to Tatooine for a special episode in which the boys must contend with a series of menaces, including bratty older sister Candace as an overeager stormtrooper. "I've always looked so good in white," she sings. "I'm a certified, full-blown, armor-wearing zealot."

5. In the 1996 *Friends* episode "The One with the Princess Leia Fantasy," Ross tells Rachel about his obsession with Carrie Fisher in her iconic gold bikini from *Return of the Jedi*. Rachel ultimately gives him his dream scenario, but the moment is thwarted when he imagines something creepier than Jabba the Hutt: his mother in the Leia outfit.

6. Cookie Monster, as Flan Solo, struggles to control his urge to eat his partner, Chewie the Cookie, in the 2014 *Sesame Street* parody "Star S'mores." Only One Cannoli offers some helpful advice: "Use the four. When you start to lose control, stop and count to four."





A young fan got into the spirit in London ahead of the 2015 European premiere of *The Force Awakens*.



THE FANDOM

||||||||||||||||||||

Star Wars fans come in all ages and with all kinds of obsessions, celebrating the franchise with creativity and passion.





Lightsabers were ubiquitous at the 2019 Celebration in Chicago. Fans attended panels on the movies, TV shows, video games, books, comics and toys.

GEEKING OUT

The Ultimate Fan Festival

What's it like to attend Star Wars Celebration? We sent a reporter to the four-day convention to experience the Force of fandom.

BY JEN YAMATO

THREE YEARS AGO, in a galaxy not so far away, an estimated 65,000 Star Wars fans from across the globe quested their way to the biggest convention center in the United States. Their mission: to be one with the Force that has fueled the multibillion-dollar franchise since 1977.

They came to Chicago in April 2019 dressed as Jedi warriors, stormtroopers, Wookiees, bounty hunters, Kylos, Reys, Lukes and Leias, with children, families, fan clubs and friends in tow—fans of all stripes representing every known corner of the Star Wars universe. Featuring



panels, sneak peeks, celebrity signings and cosplay meetups, Star Wars Celebration is a uniquely immersive experience for fans of the now-Disney-owned space opera franchise. (After postponements due to the pandemic, the next Celebration is scheduled to be held in May 2022 at the Anaheim Convention Center in California.)

In the cavernous convention ballroom at McCormick Place, vendors sold wall-to-wall Star Wars merch. You could get Lando Calrissian, R2-D2 or the Rebel Alliance logo inked onto your skin by your favorite tattoo artist and snag autographs from stars like

Ahmed Best, Jar Jar Binks himself. Guests could sign up to look for love at one of several speed-dating sessions, and a few high rollers mulled purchasing a rare Boba Fett action figure valued at \$365,000, according to collectibles broker Brian Rachfal of Roseville, California. Opening a direct channel to the hearts, minds and pocketbooks of their core audience, the Celebration is one of Disney's savviest promotional undertakings.

Star Wars Celebration is part fan service, part megacorporate marketing. Each morning in Chicago, a DJ blasted nerd-themed club mixes

and "Bohemian Rhapsody" to pump up audiences for sneak peeks of Disney's Star Wars product slate.

During Friday's centerpiece panel highlighting the December 2019 release of saga-ending *The Rise of Skywalker*, 7,000 fans at Wintrust Arena rose to their feet in a standing ovation for actress Kelly Marie Tran, who became visibly emotional at the gesture. It was a palpable display of support for Tran nearly a year after online harassers chased her off social media following the release of *The Last Jedi*, which introduced her Resistance heroine, Rose Tico.

Then there's the commercial flip side of Star Wars Celebration, where unabashed brand synergy can test the patience of the cynically minded. Saturday, on the very same stage, cheers met the announcement that Coca-Cola had been officially written into the Star Wars canon, its logo "translated" into the fictional language of Aurebesh for the Galaxy's Edge attraction that was about to open at Disney parks in California and Florida.

First held in 1999 in Denver ahead of the release of *The Phantom Menace*, Celebration has been staged over a dozen times since in the U.S., Europe and Japan, usually built around an upcoming film release or franchise milestone. It's more intimate and navigable than the all-encompassing geek mecca of San Diego's Comic-Con International, and there's only one universe to deep-dive into. That's what enticed longtime Star Wars fan Alexa Border of Woodland Hills, California. "It's still smaller than Comic-Con, so it's not as overbearing with the amount of people. And everything here is from the same fandom, and that's really nice," she said, taking a moment in a quiet promenade hallway where dozens of attendees sat resting and charging their phones.

Dressed in Daisy Ridley's "Battle Rey" costume from *The Last Jedi*, Border was heading to a meetup of Rey cosplayers. Her companion, a *Rogue One* Rebel trooper named Jim Villarreal, also from the San Fernando Valley, nodded in agreement. "I grew up on Star Wars," said Villarreal, who saw *A New Hope* in the theater as a kid. Recently he took his fandom to the next level, joining a Facebook fan group and cosplaying for charity and at conventions. "I've always enjoyed it, even more so over the years," he said.

In his squad button-up after donning a stormtrooper uniform earlier in the day, 501st Legion member Tom Rohlf of Des Moines, Iowa, said it's his love of Star Wars and the community he's found in the fandom that bring him to Celebration. He came to his first in Indianapolis in 2005, in search of exclusive merchandise. A few years later he joined the ranks of the 501st, an international fan group whose members cosplay as screen-accurate stormtroopers and other Star Wars villains at costume and charity events. "That's the cool thing," Rohlf said. "With the 501st it's got to be screen accurate, but we don't care who's in it. Kids don't see the differences like adults do. They just see, 'That's Darth Vader. That's Rey!'

And we love it."

Rohlf considered the slice of fandom that engenders negativity and described being inside the Celebration arena to witness Tran's emotional moment. "She cried, I'm pretty sure a lot of people in the audience cried," he said. "It was awesome—to make her see that we're not all that way."

If toxic fans were present in the convention center, they weren't wearing their sentiments on their sleeve. Among the many female Kylo Rens, inclusive Jedi and mash-up cosplayers were fans in Celebration-exclusive T-shirts emblazoned with a simple, powerful message: "Star Wars is for everyone." Toxic fandom "is definitely an online thing," said Villarreal. "And it's kind of gotten out of control. I think people need to remember that [Star Wars] is something that brings people joy."

Oscar Isaac, who played Resistance pilot Poe Dameron in the most recent trilogy of films and is of Guatemalan and Cuban descent, reinforced the cross-cultural reach of the franchise when he taught moderator Stephen Colbert the Spanish title of Star Wars. "It's *La Guerra de las Galaxias*," he said, adding a shoutout to the Spanish version of R2-D2's name: Arturito.

To date, Star Wars has been trans-

lated into more than 50 languages. The 2019 Celebration welcomed attendees from all 50 U.S. states and more than 54 countries. Clad in jeans and a T-shirt and casually carrying a lightsaber as he walked into his first Celebration was 14-year-old Carlos Rio, who traveled from Mexico with his parents and 9-year-old sister, Tania, who sported Carrie Fisher's classic *A New Hope* dress and buns, to attend the convention. "I'm kind of obsessed with Star Wars," he said. "It's meant a lot to me since I was a kid. I just love it. I think it's because of the story, the characters—all things Star Wars."





Creative cosplay was everywhere at Celebration, including a clever take on Han Solo trapped in carbonite. Opposite: John Boyega, Isaac and Tran charmed the fans.

My favorite movie is *Revenge of the Sith*, and I really like the prequels."

Brand synergy galore greeted fans the moment they walked onto the exhibition floor, where Amazon hawked Star Wars-licensed merchandise and the Geico gecko peered out at fans from its booth as an official sponsor of the Star Wars stage. A few feet away, stormtroopers in bathrobes and hair curlers mingled, Sith browsed booths, and full-body-suited Ewoks yub-nubbed around, as they do.

Gormaanda, the four-armed chef from the infamous *Star Wars Holiday Special*, stirred and whipped to the delight of passersby while a

purple-haired Vice Admiral Holdo stood in line for coffee. Near an Ahch-To backdrop, one of several *Last Jedi* Thala-Sirens replete with udders held a glass of Luke's favorite green milk. Among a line of Leias marching to a photo op with Jabba the Hutt was a cosplayer dressed as George Lucas in a bikini. The latter also posed for photographs chained to a Jawa with Mickey Mouse's face.

Incredible craftwork went into the costuming of Roberto Tateishi of São Paulo, a Brazilian fan of Japanese descent whose take on blind Jedha warrior Chirrut Îmwe of *Rogue One* turned heads. Navigating the floor

wearing milky contact lenses, Tateishi bore an uncanny resemblance to actor Donnie Yen with his handcrafted wooden staff, wearing custom-made props molded from the body of a Super 8 camera. "It's the first character who was really Asian in the Star Wars saga that was really important to the story, and I was born with a likeness to Donnie Yen's face," Tateishi said, smiling. "I prefer Han Solo, but God gave me this face," he joked.

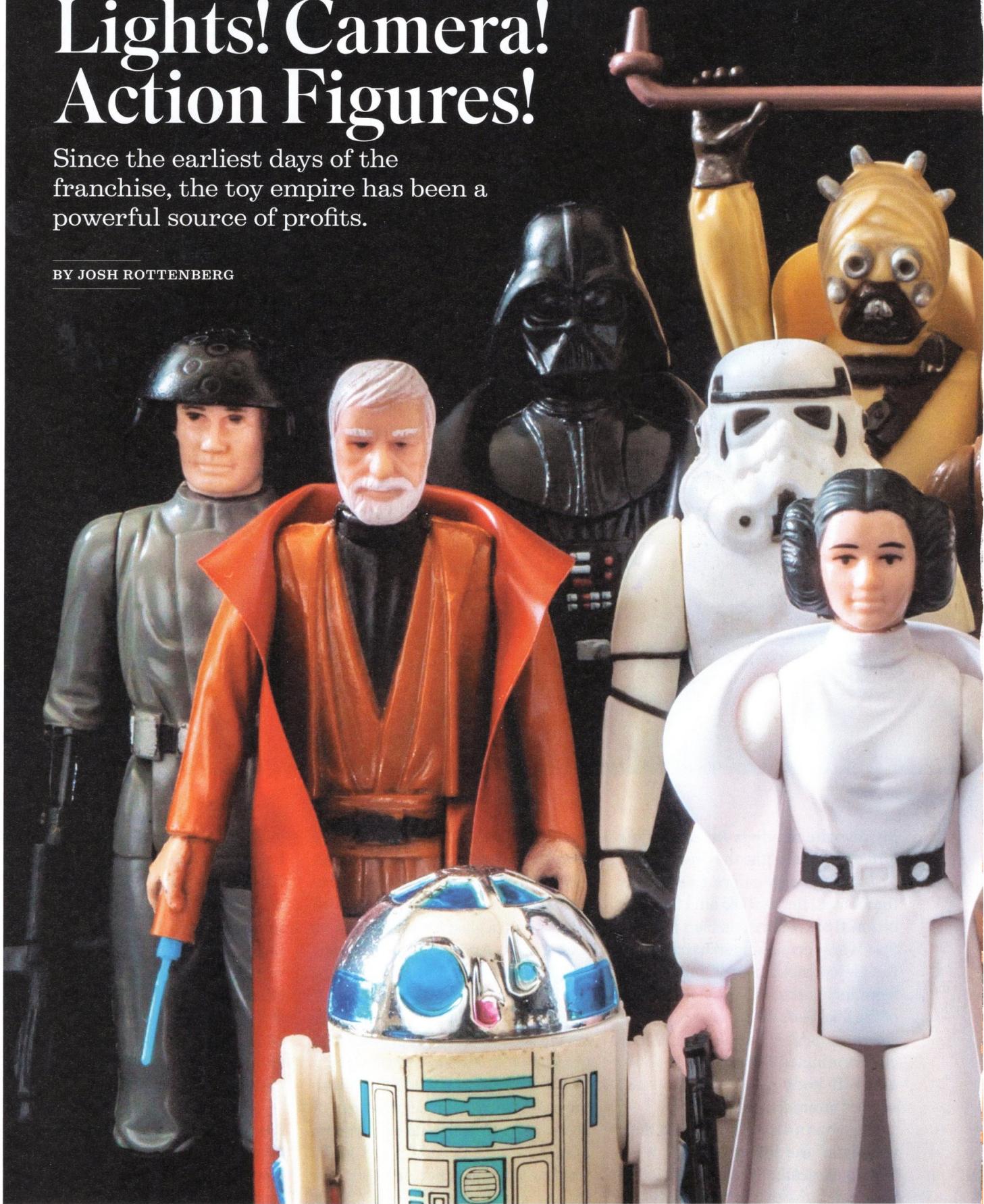
He applauded the inclusiveness that has come to the Star Wars universe in recent films. "I'm so proud that people love Chirrut.... It was a dream to come to my first Celebration." ●

THE TOYS

Lights! Camera! Action Figures!

Since the earliest days of the franchise, the toy empire has been a powerful source of profits.

BY JOSH ROTTENBERG





The first line of 3.75-inch action figures was released by Kenner in 1978. Original action figures in mint condition and in their original packaging have sold for thousands of dollars at auction.

IN 1974, A YEAR after his film *American Graffiti* hit theaters and not long after he finished the rough draft of the screenplay that would become *Star Wars*, George Lucas told an interviewer, "If I wasn't a filmmaker, I'd probably be a toymaker."

Ultimately, of course, he became both. In giving birth to the *Star Wars* universe, Lucas created not just a series of beloved movies but also a vast sci-fi sandbox in which kids could spend endless hours playing. Over the last four decades, revenue from *Star Wars* merchandise has far exceeded what the movies have earned at the box office—estimates for licensed-product sales since the first film in 1977 range from \$20 billion to \$32 billion. As any Gen Xer who ever played with a prized collection of Kenner action figures on a '70s shag rug can tell you, toys have always been the force that binds the *Star Wars* galaxy together.

Steve Evans, former design director of the *Star Wars* line at Hasbro, was one of those kids. Now in his 40s, he remembers seeing *Star Wars* at age 5 while on vacation in Los Angeles with his family from his native England. "I was instantly hooked," he told the *Times* in 2015. "My grandmother got me the Millennium Falcon that Christmas, and it went on from there."

Evans currently oversees Hasbro's line of Marvel products, but he previously was in charge of the array of toys—from action figures to vehicles to Nerf blasters to build-your-own-lightsaber kits—meeting the demands of a wide range of *Star Wars* devotees, including some whose childhood may be a distant memory. (With vintage Kenner action figures in their original packaging fetching hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars among collectors, *Star Wars* toys are clearly not just kid stuff.)

Prior to his retirement in 2020,



Action figures, lightsabers, LEGO sets and spaceships like the Millennium Falcon have helped fuel a multibillion-dollar Star Wars toy industry.

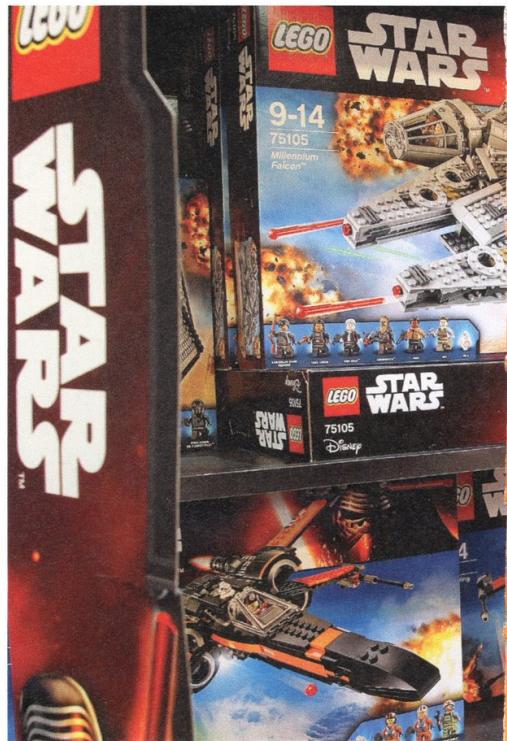
designer Mark Boudreax had been crafting Star Wars toys since the beginning of the franchise. He still recalls seeing the first film in 1977 as a 21-year-old industrial design student at the University of Cincinnati and intern at Kenner Products. “One only had to see the lines wrapped around the block—that was a good indication that Lucasfilm and Kenner had a hit on their hands,” he said. “I remember that it was all hands on deck, not only for our team but for the entire company.”

The technology involved in designing Star Wars toys has evolved considerably from those early years, when action figures were hand-sculpted from wax. “We use 3D software called ZBrush, where we do all our sculpting digitally,” said Evans. “We also have the benefit of having a lot of the props, characters and costumes digitally scanned and provided to us so we can maintain that accuracy and authenticity.”

Hasbro and dozens of other licensees have continued to work

closely with Lucasfilm on the most recent trilogy of Star Wars films, carefully coordinating the “Force Friday” rollout of toys a few months before each installment so as to avoid spoilers in marketing the pictures. “We’re very respectful of Lucasfilm’s need to make sure the story is revealed the way they want it to be,” said Evans, who noted that he wasn’t given scripts to read ahead of time. He laughed. “I probably don’t know as much as you think I do.”

Over the years, some have bristled at the never-ending toyification of the Star Wars franchise. (“The toy business began to drive the [Lucasfilm] empire,” the late Gary Kurtz, who produced *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back*, told the *Times* in 2010. “It’s a shame.”) But with Star Wars merchandising profits continuing to soar—Hasbro saw sales grow by 70 percent in 2020, thanks in part to popular *Mandalorian* scene-stealer Grogu, aka Baby Yoda—and sequels and spinoffs planned for years to come, the appetite for the toys shows no sign of abating. ●







Harvey Korman, an Emmy-winning actor from *The Carol Burnett Show*, played multiple roles in the *Holiday Special*. Bea Arthur, fresh off the acclaimed sitcom *Maude*, played Tatooine bartender Ackmena.

MEMORABLE MESS

A Not-So-Special Holiday Special

A bizarre 1978 TV show—complete with musical numbers, a family of Wookiees and . . . Bea Arthur?—turned into an infamous chapter of the *Star Wars* canon.

BY JESSICA ROY

ON THE FRIDAY before Thanksgiving in 1978, something very strange happened. A television event that had been billed as “a dazzling lineup of stars, animation, adventure, music and visual effects” turned out to be two hours of *The Star Wars Holiday Special*.

In a way, it made sense. It was the golden age of the variety show, and some of the cast of *Star Wars*, which had blown up the cinematic universe the year before, had made appearances on *The Bob Hope All Star Christmas Comedy Special* and *Donny & Marie*. It wasn’t entirely without precedent that the most popular movie of the previous year would get a variety show of its own. Even so—it wasn’t quite what viewers were expecting.

The show opened with Wookiees. Ten minutes of Wookiees. Yes, Chewbacca had a family, and they lived in a rad treehouse loft with green shag carpeting on the planet Kashyyyk. Wookiees speak Wookiee, not English, and there were no captions, so it was 10 full minutes of grunting and

miming, which is a lot.

There was something of a plot—Han Solo, played by Harrison Ford, and Chewie had to get home in time to celebrate “Life Day.” But then Harvey Korman appeared in drag as an alien Julia Child. Bea Arthur sang, tended bar at the Mos Eisley Cantina and danced with Greedo. Diahann Carroll showed up for a virtual reality number, and Jefferson Starship played a hologram concert in a box. Luke (Mark Hamill) and Leia (Carrie Fisher) made appearances, but then so did Art Carney. At the end, the Wookiees donned red robes, grabbed orbs and marched into the sun. Princess Leia sang.

Not surprisingly, the special never aired again; neither was it ever officially released by Lucasfilm. (Though the nine-minute animated segment “The Story of the Faithful Wookiee,” which introduced Boba Fett, became available on Disney+ in 2021.) It took on an urban-legendary status, occasionally popping up in bootleg VHS trading groups; Fisher once joked that she had a copy

to play at parties “when I wanted everyone to leave.”

Over the years, as *Star Wars* morphed from film to franchise, much has been written about this regrettable special. In 2018, to mark its 40th anniversary, there was even a play about its making. “Everybody went into it with good intentions,” said Andrew Osborne, the author of *Special*, a semifactual retelling of how it all went down that was staged at L.A.’s Theatre of Note.

Most of the writers and crew “were coming from a disposable pop-culture perspective,” he said, and while George Lucas was at work creating a richly textured and expansive science fiction universe, “everyone [at CBS] was like, ‘How do we work in more musical numbers?’”

It all started with the merchandise, or lack of it. When *Star Wars* premiered, no toys had even been developed. Christmas 1977 came and went without the fans getting to play Jedi and stormtroopers at home, a situation 20th Century Fox wanted to correct by Christmas 1978. But if

the studio was going to sell toys, it needed something to remind kids how much they loved their heroes. "Everybody agreed that a television special was a good idea," said the late Jonathan Rinzler, who worked on Lucasfilm's publishing initiatives from 2001 to 2016.

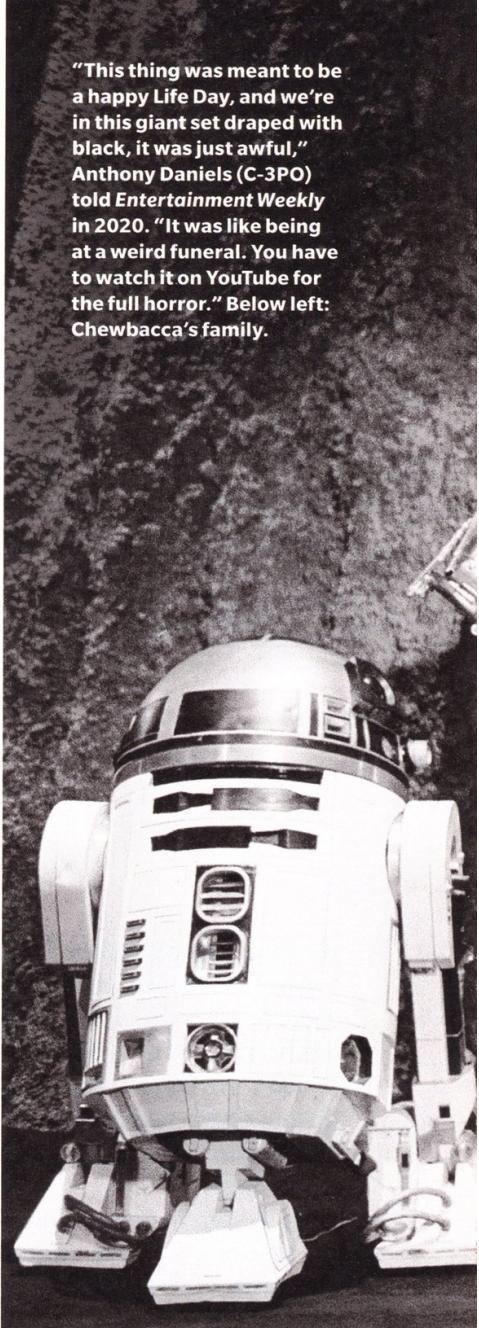
Lucas was very busy in 1978. Expectations were high for the sequel, and he was moving his production company to Northern California, so he didn't have time to get very involved with the special. He came up with the general concept, Rinzler said: He wanted to expand on the Wookiees and introduce Chewbacca's family; with concept artist Joe Johnston, he designed a "Clint Eastwood-style bounty hunter"

who was named Boba Fett.

Then, according to first-person accounts, production was turned over to CBS, which put the project in the hands of veteran variety show writers and producers. The first director got frustrated with the budget and fast-paced production schedule of television and quit. The costumes were so thick and bulky that the actors sometimes passed out. By the end, the whole thing had run out of money; the Wookiees in the final scene were shot wearing Chewbacca masks. Osborne compared it to "the variety show version of *Murder on the Orient Express*: Everybody participated a little bit in the murder."

He was 10 years old when *Star Wars* premiered, and he'd had the

"This thing was meant to be a happy Life Day, and we're in this giant set draped with black, it was just awful," Anthony Daniels (C-3PO) told *Entertainment Weekly* in 2020. "It was like being at a weird funeral. You have to watch it on YouTube for the full horror." Below left: Chewbacca's family.



date of the holiday special circled on the family calendar for weeks. But then: "Almost immediately, from the opening credits, I started thinking, *Wait, why is Bea Arthur in this? Why is Jefferson Starship in this?*"

The Boba Fett cartoon—one of the few highlights—came in just shy of the hour mark in the special. After that, Osborne said, his family flipped to *The Love Boat*. (They weren't the only ones: The special came in second to *Love Boat* in the Nielsen ratings that night for the 8 to 9 p.m. hour and second to the



miniseries *Pearl* from 9 to 10.)

Richard Woloski, who, with his wife, Sarah, co-hosts several Star Wars podcasts, was 9 years old when he watched it live; he remembers thinking, "This is all we're gonna get until 1980, we better enjoy it."

And he did—sort of. "I was confused. In the ad for the holiday special, it said 'Han and Luke battle the Empire and get Chewie home before the Wookiee holiday.' So I was like, 'When does this battle take place?' The most important message of Life Day, he said, was clearly to buy toys.

"I told my mom, 'OK, when the commercials come on, grab a pen and paper and write down everything you see,'" he recalled. "It worked on me like it was supposed to."

Tricia Barr, co-author of *Ultimate Star Wars* and *Star Wars: The Visual Encyclopedia*, was about the same age when the special aired, and while the Wookiees made a big impression on her, the familiar movie characters and the musical acts were "all mashing up in this really weird way.... Back in that time in the '70s, television was a little weird and wacky anyway."

Eventually the holiday special made it to YouTube, where it has found new life, with many fans watching it, Osborne said, "like you look back on your portrait in a high school yearbook. At the time it's mortifying, but looking back, it's like, fine, everyone looks goofy."

As for people who have never seen the holiday special for themselves, "I wouldn't tell my friends who aren't into Star Wars to watch it," Barr said. But "if you really want to know Star Wars history, then you should definitely check it out." ●

GALAXY'S EDGE

Dream Parks

Disney's new Star Wars attractions give visitors an out-of-this-world experience.

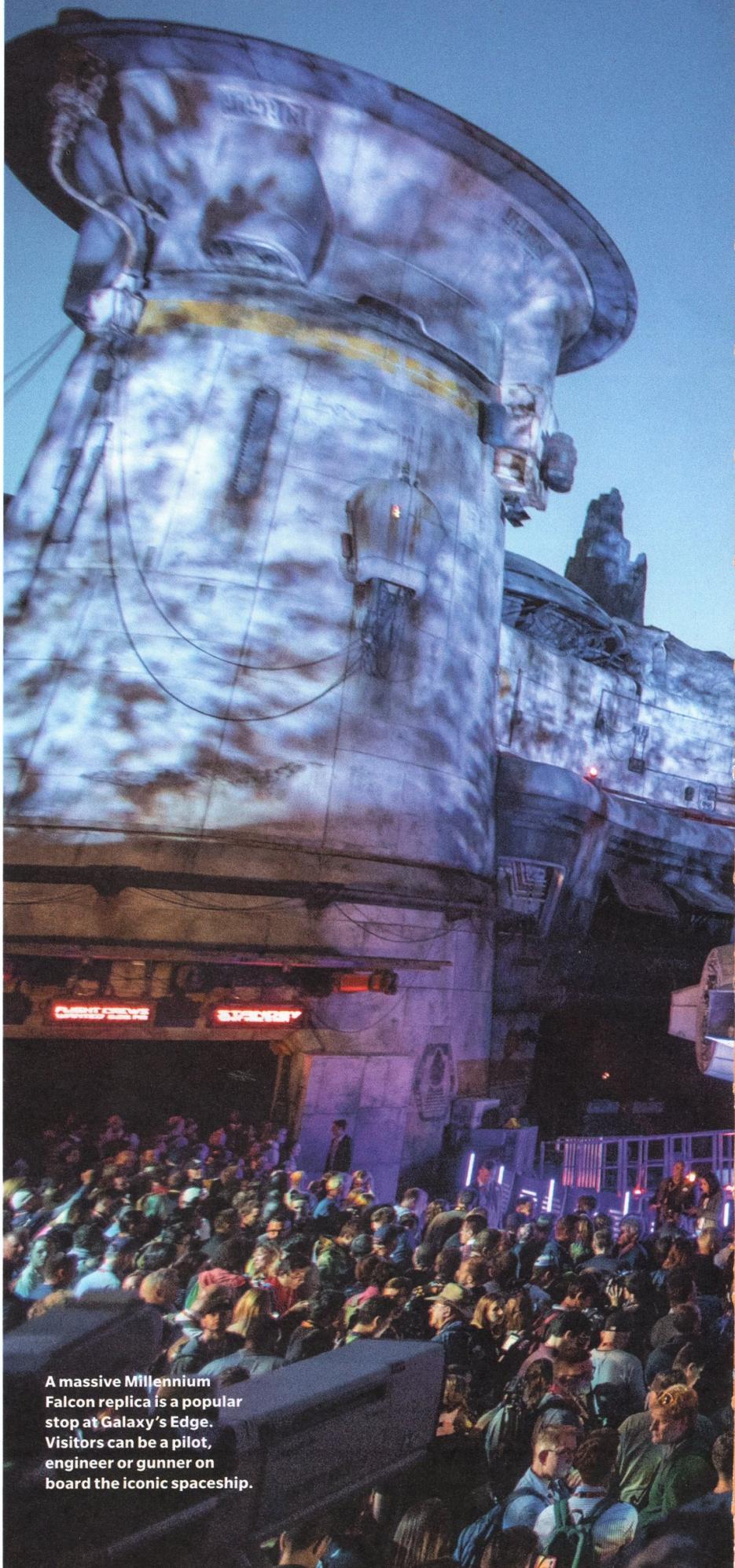
BY TODD MARTENS

A STRING OF about a dozen Disneyland guests, from little ones to grown-ups, are crouched along a wall.

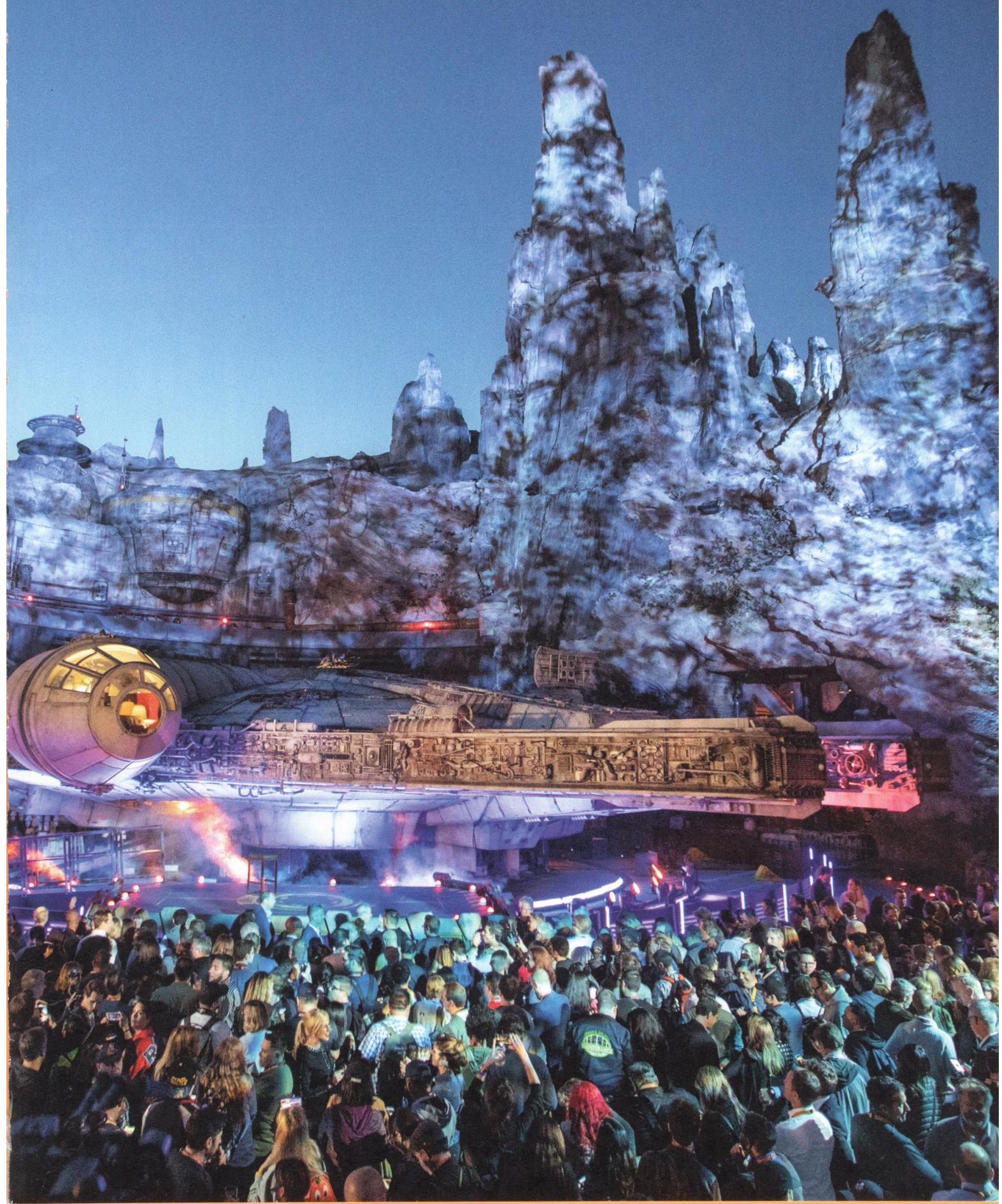
"Shhhh," implores a Disney staffer—or cast member, in park parlance—dressed as the Jedi Rey from the most recent trio of films. Rey points her staff ahead and the group follows, crouching all the way to another wall, this one sculpted and painted to look as though it was charred by galactic battle and blaster fire.

We are inside Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge, a 14-acre space that cradles Frontierland and Disneyland's Rivers of America. While Sleeping Beauty Castle is a short walk away, this is still a place of fairy tales, only the fantasy here has Western and sci-fi trappings. And hints of danger.

Now approaching Rey and her cadre of followers, a group that is growing in size and onlookers, are a pair of stormtroopers. Rey jumps up to approach them, telling the group to point their hands outward. Star Wars fans know this is the universal symbol to "use the Force." Rey slowly tells the stormtroopers there are no Rebels here. The



A massive Millennium Falcon replica is a popular stop at Galaxy's Edge. Visitors can be a pilot, engineer or gunner on board the iconic spaceship.





A young visitor inspected the deck of a Star Destroyer as part of the *Rise of the Resistance* attraction, which simulates a battle with the First Order.

agents of the evil First Order turn and walk back whence they came. The quest, which played out not too long ago in a land not too far away known as Anaheim, was a successful one.

STAR WARS IS many things: movies, TV series, books, comics, soundtracks, video games and sometimes even a lifestyle. But one of its powers, dating to May 1977, is to inspire play. Depending on your age, the toys that accompany

the films and shows are either collectibles or tools for sparking imagination. But whereas Star Wars toys were once molded from wax and had the ability to draw lines around the block, today Star Wars fans who make a pilgrimage to Disneyland in California or Florida's Walt Disney World are lucky to have their very own play set—a life-size and lifelike re-creation of a fictional planet that asks guests to lean in and participate.

"From day one, George Lucas made this a set of stories that invited play," says Scott Trowbridge of Walt Disney Imagineering, the division of the company dedicated to theme park experiences. Trowbridge was a principal architect of Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge, home to two rides, the arcade-like romp that is Millennium Falcon: Smugglers Run and the nearly 20-minute, immersive theater-inspired Star Wars: Rise of



the Resistance. "Star Wars really does occupy a very special kind of inflection point in the way movies, movie stories and movie characters translate into products," Trowbridge continues. "You can take these things home with you, and you can have a more durable relationship with the stories and characters, and it became a place where you could expand on the stories to find yourself in those stories and to some extent remix those stories. And

I think that DNA is expressed in Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge, where we really want you to be a participant."

I'VE WITNESSED IT firsthand many times since Galaxy's Edge opened in Anaheim in May 2019. I've seen Rey and Chewbacca lead guests throughout the land, a pivot from the standard meet-and-greet of standing and posing for a photo. Here, Rey is an inhabitant, and guests meet her on her terms. The



"From day one, George Lucas made this a set of stories that invited play."



atmosphere itself inspires one to get into character—its sounds natural, its walls towering, its fake fermented trees hinting at a past, and its cast members who speak to you as if you're tourists not at a theme park but on another planet.

I was struck recently when a friend visiting Galaxy's Edge for the second time lightly punched my arm and said, "Beware. I have a bounty on my head." Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge is designed as a living place rather than well-known

theme park panoramas such as Fantasyland or Adventureland. "We wanted to make sure we were leaving room for you, and for your friend to be a bounty hunter," Trowbridge says when I relay this story. "The story that's happening in her head, there has to be room for it, so she can plant a story seed in her head and take it as far as she wants it to."

All of this was a risk, even if it nodded back to Disneyland's beginnings, most notably in the staged shootouts

and pack mules that brought theatrics and activity to Frontierland. Tom Sawyer Island joined the latter in 1956, allowing guests to run free amid caves, trails and a suspension bridge. But soon, attractions such as Big Thunder Mountain Railroad, Pirates of the Caribbean and the Haunted Mansion, among many others, filled the park and turned guests into passive viewers. Only in the past decade or two have things started to change, most prominently, perhaps, at Universal Studios'

Inside the Millennium Falcon at the Smugglers Run attraction. Oga's Cantina serves snacks and drinks with names like Fuzzy Tauntaun and Jabba Juice (right). Lieutenant Bek of the Resistance on board a transport (below).



Wizarding World of Harry Potter. In 2014, the latter introduced interactive wands, which turned the whole land into an attraction—or a play set. Then things accelerated, with theme park designers increasingly looking at experiential art spaces, such as the Meow Wolf collective's House of Eternal Return in Santa Fe, New Mexico, or even immersive theater such as Sleep No More in New York City, to raise the question of how willing guests might be to engage in a

space on a mass scale.

For Galaxy's Edge, Trowbridge recalls one lunch meeting with then Disney CEO Bob Iger and Star Wars creator Lucas, where he explained this play-focused pitch and detailed that Galaxy's Edge would be a new place, one where guests wouldn't see Luke's home planet or familiar sights such as the Death Star. Galaxy's Edge is set on the planet of Batuu in a city known as Black Spire Outpost, and it's also home to shops where guests can build their

own droid or lightsaber, the latter a full theatrical experience with a hint of Star Wars mythology and spirituality.

"I was, of course, somewhat nervous," Trowbridge says of his lunch with the two executives. "And trepidious in saying I think we want to not take advantage of the massive equity that exists inside people's minds and hearts. It was not an immediately intuitive decision. That's where the mind goes: 'Oh, you're building a Star Wars thing. Wouldn't it be great to go to the



"If we have successfully given you the tools to pretend and enough reasons to believe that you're willing to suspend your disbelief, that is a win," says Galaxy's Edge architect Scott Trowbridge.

place that I saw in that movie?" But we're not in those stories."

Iger was ready, says Trowbridge, to greenlight the concept. "Mr. Iger was on board pretty quickly. We had that conversation before we sat down with Lucas. Bob was on board at that point. Sharing it with George was explaining why this was the approach. This is the emotional arc we want to try to represent." Star Wars, says Trowbridge, isn't a specific story but a way of telling stories.

Galaxy's Edge hasn't been immune to criticism, namely that both rides are set between the eighth and ninth films in the Skywalker saga, which could be seen as grounding the attraction in a specific moment in a Star

Wars timeline. While Trowbridge wasn't ready to announce new characters or features coming to the land, he stressed that what fans see in theaters or on Disney+ will make their way into Galaxy's Edge. Thus far, for instance, guests haven't seen, say, the Mandalorian or Grogu—colloquially known as Baby Yoda—wandering the land.

"Black Spire Outpost was specifically designed to reflect different epochs of storytelling and different kinds of storytelling," Trowbridge says. "I'll just say this. We have always said that Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge is not locked in a single place and time or a single set of characters and stories. It needs to grow and expand and reflect

the broad range of Star Wars storytelling. We have 40 years behind us and 40 years ahead of us, and Galaxy's Edge needs to connect with all of that."

In the meantime, the land stands as a reminder of why theme parks are important, how they exist as temples dedicated to the power of play. "That's something the Disney parks, overall, are great at," Trowbridge says. "They're a place to allow your imagination to come out and to allow your inhibitions to drop. It's a safe place to play. It's a safe place to wear a funny hat. It's safe to decide there's a bounty on your head. I think that's really important, that we continue to give people reasons to believe that what they're seeing is real and tools to pretend." ●

Los Angeles Times

STAR WARS

THE SKYWALKER SAGA AND BEYOND



The prequel trilogy has received its share of criticism, but one high-light was getting to see Yoda masterfully wield a lightsaber.

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INTO THE WOODS

George Lucas and director
Richard Marquand with the
Return of the Jedi cast,
on location in Northern
California in 1982.

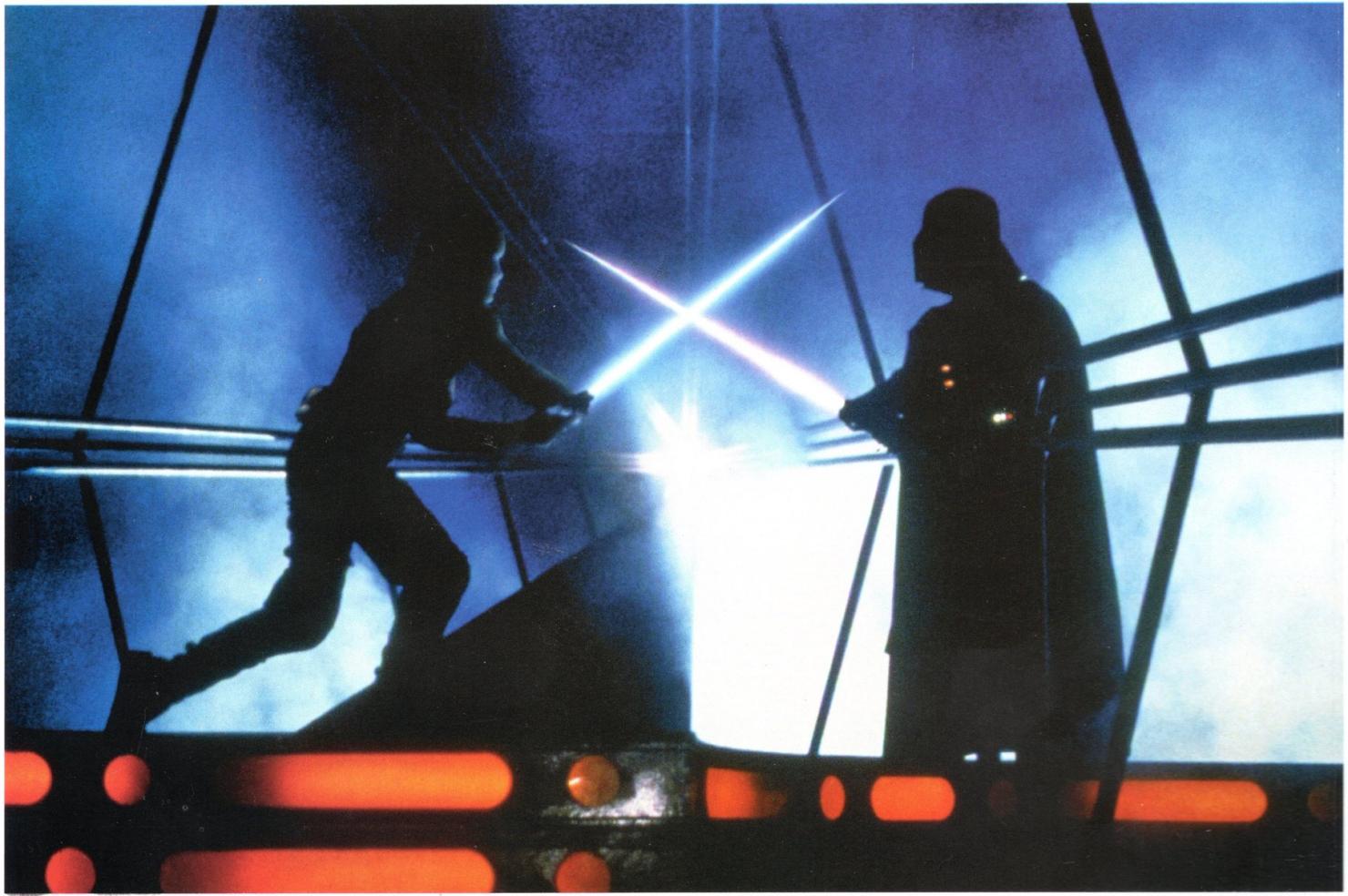
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THE FORCE, FOREVER

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